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I'M COMING
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The future is almost here

Pre-millennium tension aside, 1999 is shaping up to be a great year. In May, the biggest movie event of the decade will happen, courtesy of George Lucas and *Episode One* of *Star Wars*, a film that promises to eclipse even the one-billion-dollar might of *Titanic*. Almost as important will be LucasArts' releases of what will undoubtedly be some of the most eagerly anticipated videogames of recent times. On page 32 we reveal the strategy that will ensure those games are everything we expect, and more. Join us as we go behind the scenes at the Lucas compound in San Rafael, California, for exclusive access to the key people and key titles that will pave the way for a videogame event every bit as stellar as the movies they represent — including an in-depth look at *Rogue Squadron*, the first Lucas game in years that enables you to play as Luke Skywalker, and the first detailed preview of the return of a certain fedora-wearing archaeologist.

While LucasArts pampers and prepares its characters for more outings, **Next Generation** takes a closer look at the art of character design. Ever wondered why Mario wears dungarees? Or why Lara Croft carries a backpack? The answers begin on page 78, and they may surprise you.

What may also surprise you is what the guys who created Lara Croft did next. The full story on why Toby Gard and Paul Douglas left Lara and Core behind, and the first U.S. unveiling of their next potential blockbuster — due in 1999 — is on page 106. 1999: It should be a very good year.



NEXT GENERATION

October 1998

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The wrong thing to say to your significant other when working on a weekend: "Don't you have a friend you can call or something?"

Coming soon on the CD: TR's experimental classic: *Scrod. Scrod. Scrod.*

Have fun in school, Calvin.

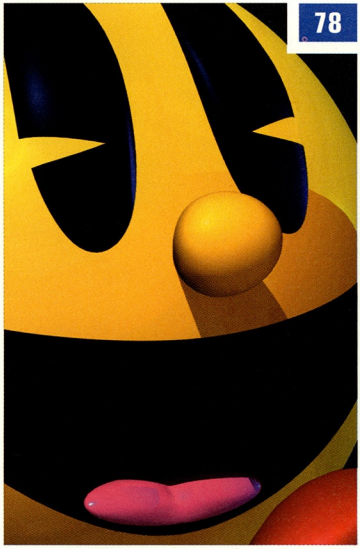
Our favorite hamburger: The Smoke House.



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How do you **top Lara Croft?**

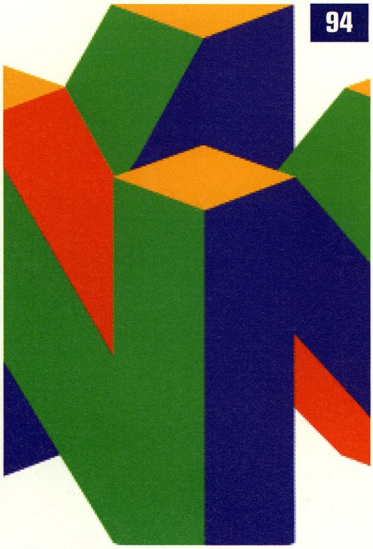
They created the symbol of 32-bit gaming and one of the late '90's most recognizable pop-culture icons. However, in February '97, at the peak of the first *Tomb Raider* wave, Toby Gard and Paul Douglas waved good-bye to Core Design (and heavy-duty royalty checks) and headed out to create their own design house, Confounding Factor. Why did they leave, and what are they up to now?



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A **question** of **character**

Ever since *Pac-Man* first broke on the scene in 1980, games have had lots of character. A **Next Generation** report

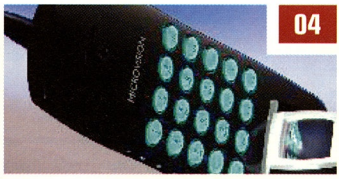


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Nintendo 64: the next generation

What was once an overpowered system with an underpowered library has grown a bit — we preview 60 upcoming N64 games









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Game engines get better • Now that EA has gobbled up Virgin, what's next? • VR that's easier on the eyes • An Apple II reunion • Plus, all the usual columns







Alphas: 27 games previewed

A major report on what's up at LucasArts • *Tribes* • *Jet Force Gemini* • *T'ai-Fu* • *Dungeon Keeper 2* • *Myth II* • *NASCAR 3* • *Rayman 2* • 14 more in Milestones



Finals: 20 games reviewed

F-Zero X (N64) • *MechCommander* (PC) • *Shining Force III* (Saturn) • *Incoming* (PC) • *MLB '99* (PSX) • *Road Rash 3D* (PSX) • *Dominion* (PC) • Plenty more ...

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Everyone has their favorite, but where did they all come from, and why do some endure?

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Confounding Factor
Toby Gard and Paul Douglas left the safety and security of Core to do their own thing. So what have they been up to since creating Lara Croft?

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As hardware becomes more sophisticated, so too do game engines; meanwhile, **EA gobbles up Westwood and continues its dominance**

INTELLIGENCE

Game industry news and analysis

ENGINES OF CREATION

Is 400MHz too much? Hardly. New **game engines** are poised to deliver **stunning new experiences**, thanks entirely to hardware





***Drakan*'s landscapes are essentially multiple bump-maps in 3D space, a direct result of the CPU's horsepower**

The hottest trend in boring business magazines is to question advances in Moore's law. Four hundred megahertz PCs are fast enough for 99% of all business applications, goes the reasoning. Although the advent of dedicated 3D technology like Voodoo or PowerVR took some of the importance away from raw processor speed in 1998, that is likely to change next year, as the next generation of PC games arrives. Thanks largely to new, faster hardware, dramatic advances in engine design have taken place, as 1998 should mark the last year that every 3D engine looks suspiciously similar to *Quake*'s.

For instance, in *Drakan,* landscapes are miles deep, and every aspect of the environment, from pitiful huts to vast caves, is explorable — and all this is possible only because of new hardware advances. As a result, says Alan Patmore, president of Surreal Software, games are approaching an important landmark. "What we are seeing is the evolution of 3D. We are beginning to realize the capabilities of today's hardware and increased CPU power, which enables us to implement more ambitious designs. We have reached a paradigm shift in game development — a shift that finally utilizes technology to heighten gameplay."

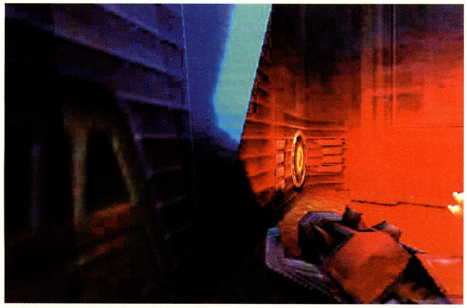


Slave Zero* uses the CPU's brawn to create giant living cities reminiscent of *Blade Runner

Accolade's *Slave Zero* is another example. The game, which incorporates hundreds of moving objects onscreen at once, simply could not be realized on previous hardware with 3D acceleration alone. "Imagine fighting in a 60-foot biomechanical 'Slave' robot in the middle of rush hour traffic in 2350 AD," explains Sean Vesce, director for *Slave Zero*. "The best part is that even the smallest elements are interactive. Ammo dry? Simply pick up a tanker truck and hurl it at that approaching Sentinel."

NEWS BITES

Preparations for Sega's unveiling of the new *Sonic* game have been taking on almost biblical proportions. The sermon of *Sonic* would be delivered to a multitude, according to chief publicist Tadashi Takezaki. "There are places in the car park for 5,000 cars, and inside the hall there will be monitors all over the place to maximize the experience for attendees," he panted. Creator Yuji Naka was in beautific mood about the immaculate second coming. "Usually when you make games, you can always see room for improvement, but with *Sonic Adventure*, this time I truly thought it was perfect." **Crisis? What crisis?** So said Blizzard president and co-founder, Mike Morhaime, following the departure of 10 members of staff in the same week. "While each of these individuals has made valuable contributions to our products, Blizzard's success has never been attributed to any individual or small group of individuals," he said. Is it at all possible that those were the words he used when he found 10 resignation letters on his desk that morning? Perhaps, but not probable. **EA** — **the global** videogame industry's very own *Pac-Man* (especially after nabbing Westwood) — has been spotted in central Europe gobbling up distribution outfits and subsidiaries. The company now operates in more countries than the Moonies (possibly) and is no doubt contemplating a pan-galactic strategy for the next millennium. **A big hand please for** Moody's



Raycast lighting in Humansoft's *Seed* isn't just for looks; it is a crucial element of gameplay made possible by the next generation PC

Altor Systems describes its realtime 3D adventure engine as realizing the expectation gamers had for *Myst* before they discovered it had only static graphics. The interface for Altor's game *Nightfall* utilizes a virtual hand within the environment, enabling players to pick up and throw objects, move switches, or climb ladders. The engine produces *Myst*-like, photorealistic 3D visuals in real time, with real world physics. "When holding objects, they actually feel like they are heavy," says Vice President David Rees. "You can do incredibly complex and subtle things with hardly any learning effort, and then get on and enjoy the game. The physics enables you to grab other objects, even living ones that might not like it — and they can struggle! It is the evolution of interaction."

Meanwhile, Humansoft's *Seed* will use a realtime raytracing renderer that enables the team to produce unprecedented effects. "For example," says Gabor Kadas, president of Humansoft, "there is a type of red light that harms you. Imagine a room with this red light beaming from the ceiling. There is a moving platform in the room that casts its shadow on the floor. Now, to avoid the deadly light, you follow the platform's shadow. There is another platform, where the parts of the platform that are hit by light become nonexistent. Only the part of the platform that remains in the shadows remains solid for the player to stand on. The way around this is to push an object in front of the platform, hence the light source is blocked out."

Increases in hardware power are also blurring the line between genres. Sierra's *Starsiege Tribes* uses a technology made up of three rendering engines: one each for the terrain, the interiors, and the skeletal motion captured people and objects. But Sierra isn't the only company exploring this idea. Surreal Software has been developing a similar technology for *Drakan,* in which worlds are created by laying down sections of geometry that are modified to create organic landscapes and caves. "Because all parts of the world are created using this system, we can use the same engine for indoor and outdoor environments, and everything transitions seamlessly," says Patmore. "To my knowledge, nothing like this has been done before. Everyone either has fully indoor engines like *Quake,* or fully outdoor engines like *Magic Carpet*. Our tools allow us to edit the geometry of the worlds in real time, so we know exactly how the world will look and play once in the game."

The bottom line is that 3D hardware alone is not enough to enable the next generation of games. Says Kadas, "Writing a 3D engine that only supports 3D cards certainly helped those developers who quickly wanted to implement their ideas and had no use for original graphical effects. However, most developers want to use more than just the hardware or API's abilities. They use light maps, BSP trees, animated textures. Without these additional features, the 3D engine would look rather plain. It is not enough to just do a hardware engine." NG



***Starsiege Tribes* delivers 32-player gaming with limitless horizons and complex geometries, something that was impossible two years ago**

SONY PRICE DROP?

Several sources have reported to **Next Generation** that Sony may drop the price of PlayStation to as little as $99, perhaps by the time you read this in September.

"That's been a perennial rumor for quite some time," insists Kevin Horn, a Sony spokesperson. "The fact is, no platform has ever been so successful so fast."

Which may be exactly why a price drop is in order. Sales of PlayStation have been nothing short of phenomenal for the last three years, but in the face of increasing competition from Nintendo and a user base rapidly approaching the saturation point, the move toward a mass-market price range could be a sound strategy.

This is especially true given that Sony as a whole reported a 5% drop in profits during the first quarter of the 1998-99 fiscal year over the same period in 1997-98, with PlayStation being the only bright spot. Continuing that momentum through the coming holiday season should be a top priority for the electronics giant.

Although third parties are understandably leery of making direct comment, one source who wished to remain anonymous said, "There's definitely more buzz about [a price drop] right now than just the usual. Frankly, we [third-party publishers] would be ecstatic."

Asked about the price drop, a Nintendo spokesperson said, "As always, Nintendo will respond to the marketplace appropriately." So, we expect that this story could easily have been titled, "Sony, Nintendo price drop?"

WHAT IS IT?

The first game in which sci-fi horror artist H.R. Giger displayed his eerie talents.

Investors Service, which in July (this year, mind you) downgraded Sega's fortunes on the basis that it was feeling the squeeze due to "intense competition from financially stronger competitors." Good to see the financial world's infobahn just zipping along. **Gallant attempts to bring** more emotion to videogames are bearing the fruits of success. Pandemic CEO Josh Resnick explains the latest breakthrough in his war game *Dark Reign 2*: "We're going to be placing a tremendous amount of focus on the characters in the game. When your units get injured, you'll see the pain on their faces as they limp to a first aid station." Coooool. **Doubtless the need** to attain a low age rating has absolutely nothing to do with Acclaim and The Comedy Channel's decision to tone down violence in *South Park*. Although the game will be comedy/combat-based, there will be no, repeat no, cat swinging. **Most appropriate game name** of the month is the sequel to *Grand Theft Auto* — the game will be called *Repeat Offender*. **According to the International** Intellectual Property Association, nine in every 10 games sold in Russia are illegal copies, costing American game publishers $223 million a year. **Psygnosis is looking** for a self-reinvention. The firm has stated that it (a) needs to make better PC games and (b) needs to recognize that not all gamers are adults. Let's hope this is a two-lane strategy, or the best we can expect is one hell of a Barney PC title.

DATASTREAM

(All numbers in millions) Worldwide hardware sales for Game Boy in 1989: $1.09. In 1998: $11.02. Total hardware sales to date: $65.78. Worldwide Game Boy software sales for 1989: $3.33. Worldwide software sales in 1998: $34.6. Total software sales to date: $269.91. Total units of *Mario 64* sold in North America: 3.5 million. Total units of *Goldeneye* sold in North America: 2.15 million. Percentage of Nintendo players under the age of 12: 25. Percentage of players between the ages of 12 and 17: 25. Nintendo's net sales for the 1998 fiscal year: $4 billion.

EA TAKES WESTWOOD

Is this the **last nail** in **Virgin Interactive's** coffin?

Rarely has a company been so diminished by its own market availability than in the case of Virgin Interactive Entertainment. Perhaps the long and protracted sale by parent company Spelling will have finally undone what was once viewed as a significant player in game publishing.

As **Next Generation** went to press, Electronic Arts announced that it had "signed a definitive agreement to purchase all outstanding stock" of Virgin's prize studio Westwood, as well as its internal studio in Irvine. This amounts to a buy-out of VIE's creative presence.

The deal cost EA $122.5 million. This is by no means an inflated price for Westwood alone, which can point to eminently marketable brands of the *Command & Conquer* ilk, as well as a reputation for creating daring and popular games like *Blade Runner*. EA will also have added the weighty presence of Brett Sperry and Louis Castle to its phalanx of sharp, aggressive senior executives.

The Virgin sale had become a tiresome saga. Only as recently as May, the firm seemed to be on the verge of a deal with GT. But it fell through on the eve of an E3 announcement.

Rumors filtered through that buyers were increasingly frustrated by Spelling's desire to sell VIE as a whole package. But the potential buyers were generally established publishers with an eye for development additions. The days of outsiders seeking publishers are long gone. Indeed, Spelling is just one of an early 1990s influx of media giants that attempted to enter the industry, generally with lackluster or even dismal results.

The question remains as to the future viability of VIE as a publisher. After all, it is still an operational outfit. In theory it could seek to establish third-party contracts and bolster its much-diminished distribution presence in Europe. But this doesn't seem likely considering the fact that Virgin has recently lost the European distribution rights to LucasArts games.

Morale at Virgin is said by insiders to be at an all-time low. This is hardly surprising for a company that has been hemorrhaging middle management for the past two years and has been in a state of flux for just as long.

The significance in this deal, though, isn't in the future of Virgin, but in the incredible presence of EA, which could arguably claim to be bigger than its next three U.S. publishing competitors combined. NG



***Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun* is now property of Electronic Arts**





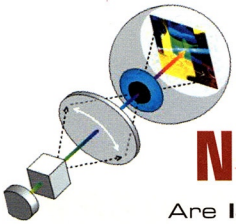
After losing Westwood and its properties, Virgin Interactive appears to be all but dead

IT IS ...

Dark Seed by Cyberdreams. As Mike Dawson, players fought the clock to have an alien removed from their heads before it found its own way out. It was released for Amiga, Macintosh, and PC.

NEWS BITES CONT.

Activision, MicroProse, and Avalon Hill have agreed to compromise on the whole sorry *Civilization* spat, even if the compromise looks a lot like a general agreement that MicroProse was right all along. It retains worldwide ownership of the *Civilization* trademarks and copyrights, including rights to the board games and computer games. Meanwhile, Activision will continue to publish its upcoming game *Civilization: Call to Power*, but only under license from MicroProse. And Activision has acquired the publishing rights for *Civilization II* for PlayStation from MicroProse. **Ken Kutaragi won't say** specifically what he wants to see in PlayStation 2, but he knows what he doesn't like — the things competitors just happen to be making. He told *EE Times*: "Graphics chip vendors in Silicon Valley today are all doing the same thing. They are obsessed with the polygon race. Their research and development goals are so nearsighted that they are only paying attention to gradual changes in graphics technologies that can be developed in lock-step with the short-term PC product-development cycle." **Distressed princess** and warrior goddess are the general roles women play in games. But that's about to change. Alas, not for the better. The newest female character comes courtesy of a game called *Wonder Project J2*. She's a schoolgirl whose subconscious must be probed by the player/character, a psychoanalyst.



NEXT STEP

Are **lasers** the **future of virtual reality?**

Virtual reality, the technology that immerses users in computer-generated worlds through the use of head-mounted displays (HMD), is undergoing a significant evolution.

After receiving tremendous publicity in the early '90s, VR failed to live up to popular expectations and mostly disappeared. But VR may be making a comeback, with a new twist. Under the direction of Professor Thomas Furness, one of the pioneers of VR, the University of Washington's Human Interface Technologies Lab is experimenting with a new technology called virtual retinal displays (VRD). Instead of using an HMD with a tiny liquid crystal display (LCD) screen for each eye, VRD uses a low-level laser that projects images directly into the user's retina.



VRD uses patterns of light to create images on the eye's retina

VRD technology is producing amazing results. Most consumer HMDs had 170x100 resolution, and they could not show legible text. VRD has both monochrome and color laser VGA-quality displays. As an example of the crispness of VRD images, a scanned stock report page from the *Wall Street Journal* over VRD is completely readable.

The university is also experimenting with showing VRD images to people suffering from certain forms of blindness. Preliminary studies suggest that it might be possible to show these images to people with cataracts and advanced macular degeneracy.

The new technology could have a big impact on the game industry too. Microvision, the company that has licensed the technology, is currently developing a prototypical VRD unit that meets high-definition television standards — 1000x800 resolution with 32-bit graphics. Microvision has already demonstrated VRD technology to undisclosed parties in the location-based entertainment community.

According to Microvision Vice President of Marketing Matt Nichols, VRD is too expensive to be introduced into the consumer market now, largely due to the price of lasers. However, since the price of lasers is constantly dropping, VRD may find its way into home use in the next few years. NG



Users could access the Internet or read email on their cell phones with VRD technology

TALKBACK

"I hated *Myst*. It was so queer."
— Martha Stewart, quoted in the August issue of *Wired*

"*Night Trap* was on the evening news every two hours for a while ... My girlfriend at the time left me in a heartbeat ... I couldn't get laid to save my life, I had become the prince of everything dark and evil ... the person responsible for causing children everywhere to drink the blood of their parents and torture Barney."
— Rob Fulop on his role in creating *Night Trap*, quoted on Usenet

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

by **Colin Campbell**, **Next Generation**'s international correspondent

FLEEING THE NEST

There are bad reasons, good reasons, and great reasons for quitting a successful company. Obviously, greed for more money is a terrible reason. Disenchantment with foolish management is a compelling reason. And any form of scandalous behavior at a company function is a most admirable reason.

A growing trend in this business is the so-called "talent drain," in which "talent" drains the coffers of their employers before swaggering off with a cheerful wave to set up rival outfits.

Take a couple of regular guys who've wriggled their way through the Byzantine hierarchy of a middling publisher or large developer. Ten years into this slog, they win control over a creative project and manage to concoct a hit of *Wipeout* or *Tomb Raider* proportions. They get a raise, a faster car, a round of applause at some rah-rah meet in the local Hilton. Then there's pay dirt — the pictorial interview in **Next Generation**, complete with weird-angle photo call on those concrete steps outside the office. The guys are told to go ahead and do it all over again, except fellas, this time, "more so ..."

The idea will soon crystallize that while their talent is paying for the prized MR3 and beloved life-size *Star Wars* statues, it's also paying for the boss' Porsche, the administrator's Toyota, and the marketing director's mistakes.

The solution is to quit and go it alone, booming your pedigree into every corner of the industry. "Creatives Leave Publisher" is not a headline to tickle the cockles of online news editors. But "Top Hit Game Team Quits Sorry Outfit" has cheered many a gloomy news day. It happens so often that some publishers have one of those World War I fighter-ace-style flight boards in the coffee room. "Smithers didn't make it back, sir. He's bought the far-reaching commitment to creative integrity and independence."

Every week this scenario is played out, and if you think that makes it boring, check out the sports pages. Transfers and trades are news because they generally reveal murky tales of misery, greed, and perfidy. There's always a villain, always a loser, and sometimes there's even a good guy.

Think of a major Western game written in the last three years, and I will show you some team member who has gone West, seeking shark-toothed venture capitalists. The losing outfit will point out — sometimes with good reason — that the lost kid's contribution to the golden project was "Assistant Vice President of Daily Taco Bell Collection." But usually, the truth is that the guys who create are proto-Marxists, and they understand that the division of labor generally enriches the ones who are doing the dividing as opposed to the ones doing the laboring. Bonuses and salaries are tied to a game's success. But advances and royalties are, to coin a phrase, "more so."

If you take the Platonic view that variety and moderation are the paths to health and happiness, this should be a good thing for the industry. Like bees that set up new colonies, it ensures the survival of the species. Without this process, the game industry might begin to look about as robust as the South Korean economy. Certainly, the recent spate of fleeing creatives has put an end to the gloomy and incorrect dogma of an industry inexorably reducing itself to black monolith.

It only takes one person to create a game in its perfect, unrealized form. After that, all you need is money

It's often stated that it "takes more than one person to make a game." This is true, but it only ▸

takes one person to create a game in its perfect, unrealized form. After that, all you need is money, and publishers are ever happy to speculate, especially on talent with a proven record nurtured under the wings of a rival.

This has zillions of ramifications, not all of them good. It suggests that to be taken seriously as an independent, you must first serve your time in the tin mines of employed servitude. It demands that the newly independent talent does not simply replicate previous successes for another unimaginative publisher that is willing to pay more money.

It also requires independents to realize that while marketing people and administrators and sales staff have been left behind, these functions still need to be performed, and they need to be performed well. Even the managers fulfilled a function, which now must be undertaken.

And for a new independent there is also the burden of proof. If all you ever had in the first place was that one good game, quitting the company that paid you well for rehashing it for as long as it sold was the dumbest move you ever made.

FLASHBACK

A ghoulish look back at some of gaming's most horrific highlights — well, sort of.

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER
Data Age — Atari 2600

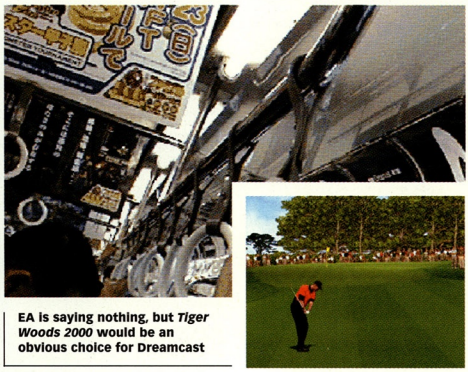


RESIDENT EVIL
Capcom — PlayStation, PC



DREAMCAST: THE SILENCE CONSPIRACY

Mum's still the word on Dreamcast **games in the works**



EA is saying nothing, but *Tiger Woods 2000* would be an obvious choice for Dreamcast

As Dreamcast nears a Japanese launch, the building groundswell of support from U.S. publishers is nothing short of amazing. Only Sony's PlayStation managed to garner this level of prelaunch commitment, but at the moment, few U.S. publishers are willing to name specific game titles.

There are a few exceptions. Epic Megagames' epic megagame *Unreal* has been firmly slated as a launch title — but will be updated and improved for the Sega system. Sega will definitely be publishing *Sonic Adventures*, *Godzilla*, *Ecco the Dolphin*, and perhaps Warp's *D2*. Other Sega possibilities include *Super GT* and *Virtua Fighter 3*. However, only *Sonic* is being exposed with any kind of aplomb.

On Acclaim's Dreamcast games, Mike Myers said: "We were one of the first to sign on, and I imagine we'll be announcing games very, very soon, but I can't name titles at this point. Acclaim has rebuilt itself based on the strength of its franchises, so you can expect to see some of those names, but I can't be more specific at this point."

Midway was equally vague, as spokesperson Andrew Hoolan repeated many of Acclaim's sentiments. "You know, we were the first company to commit to Dreamcast, and we'll definitely be making games. I'd like to tell you more, but at this point I just can't." Midway has a huge catalog of suitable titles, including *San Francisco Rush* and *NFL Blitz*.

One of the reasons for this mass silence is most likely Sega's restrictive nondisclosure policy. Another is probably Sega's insistence that third-party developers refrain from simply porting PC and PlayStation titles to the machine — a policy that helped put Nintendo in a third-party vacuum, with a paucity of games at launch. Ironically, the Dreamcast hardware virtually begs for ports and has even been described as a very high-end PC by developers.

Despite the silence, **NG** has found out about several more titles. Argonaut, always an early technology bandwagoneer, is hard at work on an action title named *Red Dog*, to be published by Sega. Again, no details were available as of press time, but Argonaut's heritage suggests an action-packed, 3D, character-based game.

Kalisto, the French developer of *Ultimate Race*, which has in the past partnered with NEC, will be producing several Dreamcast titles, including a racing game. Also in France, No ClichÈ (the company formerly known as Adeline) will be producing two action/adventures for Sega to publish. Since No ClichÈ is largely made up of the team responsible for the acclaimed *Little Big Adventure*, the results should be astonishing.

Frankly, almost everyone we spoke to is planning to develop for Dreamcast, but few are willing to state publicly which games they're developing. With the Japanese launch right around the corner, there are few big-name games and a lack of information regarding big-name RPGs (Square and Enix, specifically). *Sonic Adventures* had better be good. NG





Mechagodzilla makes an appearance in *Godzilla Generations*

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IN THE STUDIO

The X-Men aren't the only Marvel comic book characters Activision may have added to its development roster. A 3D X-Men fighting game for PlayStation is already planned for the spring of '99, but Marvel President Joseph Calamari hints in a press release that "Marvel is looking forward to a long and prosperous alliance with Activision." So which superhero is next? Although not confirmed, **Next Generation** predicts Activision will have the ever-popular Spiderman swinging his way onto PlayStation by the end of '99.



Chris Taylor, designer of *Total Annihilation* and formerly of Cavedog Studios, has started his own development studio called Gas Powered Games. Taylor has inked a multititle deal with Microsoft, and the first Gas Powered project will be an RPG for the PC.

Actors James Earl Jones and Michael Biehn will appear in FMV cut scenes of *Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun*. The sequences were shot at Westwood's own sound stage and on location in the Nevada desert. Jones (notable as the voice of Darth Vader) plays the role of General Solomon, leader of the Global Defense Initiative. And Biehn, who starred in *The Terminator, Aliens*, and *The Rock*, plays second-in-command. The game is set for a November release.



A BUSHEL OF APPLES

Apple II reunion turns up many game **industry greats**



In August, a reunion of Apple II programmers brought together a number of well-renowned game industry hotshots

A recent reunion of Apple II game programmers turned out to be something of a historic event, featuring many pioneers of the computer gaming movement. The party was hosted by John Romero, founder of Ion Storm.

Milling around Ion Storm's elaborate 54th floor office complex were industry luminaries like Eric Hammond (*One-on-One*), Mark Turmell (*Sneakers*), Ron Gilbert (creator of LucasArts hits like *Monkey Island* and *Maniac Mansion*, before founding Cavedog), Jordan Mechner (*Karateka, Prince of Persia*), and Joel Berez (founder of Infocom). But Steve Wozniak, designer of the Apple computer, co-founder of Apple Computer, and patron saint of Silicon Valley, was by far the biggest attraction. And although many of the guests are heroes to the gamers and designers of today, Wozniak is a hero to them.

Spending most of the evening in a corner, away from the crowd, Wozniak played host to a small, ever-changing group eager to hear stories from the old days — including Woz's many practical jokes (which often featured Steve Jobs as the victim) — and about Wozniak's take on technology and programming today. Although today he teaches students and teachers about computers, Wozniak has a serious game background — the Apple II was designed mainly because Wozniak wanted to do *Breakout* in software — and he still enjoys videogames. "I play *Tetris* on the Game Boy really well," he said. "I've had my name in *Nintendo Power* several times as the top scorer, and it came to a point that they wouldn't print my name, so I had to use a fake name."

There was a cast of other game industry stars as well, hobnobbing and reminiscing. Typical sights? Guests arguing about self-modifying code, the quality of various Apple II assemblers, or copy-protection schemes, or (our favorite), game designer Doug Smith (*Lode Runner*) and Broderbund founder Doug Carlston standing in a corner joking about how Carlston rejected *Lode Runner* the first time he saw it. "Then I borrowed about $1,000, to buy a color monitor and a joystick," recalled Smith, "and I resubmitted it in December. That was when I got a contract signed with Broderbund."

Smith now works as a producer at EA's Seattle office. Carlston recently sold Broderbund to The Learning Company and is now investing in Internet products.

Of the many guests attending the party, the most surprising may have been the reclusive Nasir Gebelli of Sirius Software fame, whose work spans from the early days of the Apple II (*Space Eggs*) to the later days of the Super NES. "I can't believe people remember my games," said Gebelli. "I've never liked any of my projects. I always thought they were unfinished. I can't finish a project unless somebody tells me, 'OK, you've got to stop now.' There's always improvements. I can always do more." With console game credits that include *World Runner, Rad Racer*, and *Final Fantasy* for NES, and *Secret of Mana* for Super NES, his videogames have reached a much broader audience than his computer titles. So what is Gebelli doing today? "Nothing, absolutely nothing. I'm just looking for that special project that makes me motivated." NG

HARDCORE

I was so addicted to *Defender* that I went every day to my local arcade to play it. One day, a thief came in and said, "EVERYONE DOWN! Where's the cash register?" Every person in the arcade dove for the floor, but I didn't. When the crook spotted me, he screamed, "DOWN, NOW!!!" I thought he was one of those bullies my mom had told me to ignore. He began kicking the machine and yelling so loudly that a cop around the corner heard him and came into the arcade. When the cop saw the crook with a lot of bills in his hand, he said, "Let's go, kid. I don't have time for these kinds of jokes." The cop tapped my shoulder, and for the first time, I turned around. "Thanks for distracting that crook, boy. I'm proud of you. Have a nice day!"

Mario A. Vedova
mvedova@sol.racsa.co.cr

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ARCADIA

by **Marcus Webb**, editor of *RePlay* magazine

Politicians praise game industry

Senator Herb Kohl, at a press conference last July, thanked and praised game manufacturers and arcades alike for implementing a voluntary parental advisory system, which posts ratings on games. Kohl also urged the industry to reduce violence in games and to find ways to limit children's access to age-inappropriate games.

Kohl said the industry's goodwill efforts to date make it apparent that no new laws will be necessary, also admitting that passing restrictive legislation would be an uphill battle at best.



***Daytona 2*, along with the new Naomi system, should debut in the U.S. any time now**

Yet Kohl also warned that the senators may call for a boycott of nonparticipating locations by this fall, if ratings are not implemented.

Senator Joe Lieberman normally spearheads the federal "jawboning campaign" on this issue but was unable to attend the press conference. However, text of his planned remarks was released to the media, and it stated that access limitation measures in arcades, similar to "R" ratings in movie theaters, remain "a critical component [of arcade self-regulation] because the reality is that parents generally do not accompany their kids to arcades, and without some kind of access policy, these ratings may amount to little more than 'mayhem magnets' for kids."

Speaking on behalf of the industry were game manufacturer trade association President (and Konami coin-op chief) Mike Rudowicz, Sega GameWorks' Al Stone, Namco America's Frank Cosentino, and Midway Games' Rachel Davies. "We make a wide variety of products for all age groups; in fact, we supply games to some locations which cannot be entered by under-21s," said factory execs in defense of games that are unsuitable for all ages.

They also stated pointedly that it is the primary responsibility of parents to monitor their children's media intake and that their content-based game ratings system is designed to provide information that will enable parents to do just that.

By all accounts, the overall tone was game-friendly. But have we seen the end of this issue? Hardly. States and localities are still likely to consider banning violent games or restricting arcade access, even if Congress doesn't. But for now, videogames have dodged a bullet, avoiding the sort of horrible, negative PR that Lieberman and his colleagues have heaped on them in the past.

New games are on the way

Sega's *Daytona 2* has been sighted in Japan and Australia, and we can probably expect it (along with its "Naomi" universal videogame system, based on technology from Dreamcast) to make its official U.S. debut at the next big trade show (probably the AMOA Expo in September).

Other titles surfacing there: Atari has been dropping heavy hints about forthcoming video titles, including *Site 4* (sounds a bit like *Area 51*, doesn't it?), *Gauntlet Legends*, and *Tenth Degree*.

Look for additional games this fall from Konami using its "System 573," a new coin-op board with 32-bit CPU, 16 megabyte flash memory, and CD-ROM drive. Videogame software for this one comes in CD-ROM format with security ROM cartridge, a technology that has been used in Japan with *Dark Horse Legend* and in the U.S. with *Fisherman's Bait*. Konami is definitely calling it a "system," at least in Japan, and plans to ship three software kit upgrades by March 1999, according to overseas sources.

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

October 1, 1983	The contract between Nolan Bushnell and Atari Corporation, which prevented Bushnell from working in the game industry, expires, allowing Bushnell to legally return to the industry he helped create
October 5, 1994	Williams Entertainment announces the development of *Doom* for Nintendo's upcoming Ultra 64 videogame system
October 10, 1994	Id Software releases *Doom II*
October 17, 1983	Interplay is founded
October 17, 1984	Atari sells 640,000 warrants to Warner Communications for $8 million
October 18, 1871	Mr. Charles Babbage passes away in poverty, having funded his own work after the government discontinued support. He was the English engineer and mathematician who invented the Difference Engine in 1822
October 21, 1993	Midway Manufacturing Company introduces *Mortal Kombat II* at the Amusement & Music Operators Expo in Anaheim, California
October 25, 1995	Matsushita buys 3DO's M2 technology for a fee of $100 million
October 30, 1997	The Amusement & Music Operators Association (AMOA) convention has its final day in Chicago, Illinois, at the Conrad Hilton Hotel. Atari, Inc. sends 24 coin-operated games to the event, including: *2-Game Module, Destroyer, Canyon Bomber, Ultra Tank*, and *Player's*
October 30, 1997	At Ye Old Company Store, *Pong* is available to employees for $15 and *Super Pong* for $20
October 31, 1994	First day of the trial in which Capcom attempts to sue Data East, stating that *Fighter's History* infringes on its *Street Fighter* franchise

Sources: **Next Generation Online** and Don Thomas' I.C. When (http://www.l4software.com/icwhen)

PROFILE

Name: Jeff Tunnell
Accomplishments: ***Stellar 7, Arctic Fox, A-10 Tank Killer, MechWarrior***

"I have been in this industry for so long that in most circles I am considered a dinosaur," says 41-year-old Jeff Tunnell, co-founder of Dynamix. "Most people that have been doing this as long as me are either retired or jaded. But, I have to say that I have never been more jazzed." Tunnell's latest efforts can be seen in *Starsiege Tribes* (see page 26), which has the potential to redefine 3D action games. His experience goes as far back as 1983, when he and close friend Damon Slye created *Stellar 7* for the Apple II and Commodore 64. Together they founded Dynamix in 1985 and developed *Arctic Fox* for Electronic Arts. Since 1990, Dynamix has worked with Sierra on many projects, including *Red Baron, Earthsiege*, and *Betrayal at Krondor*. Don't expect him to retire anytime soon, either. "My personal mission is to continue to build great games that bring people together for a fun time. Bring on the future!"











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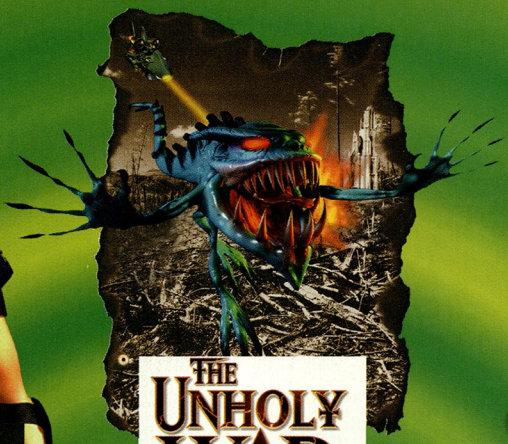
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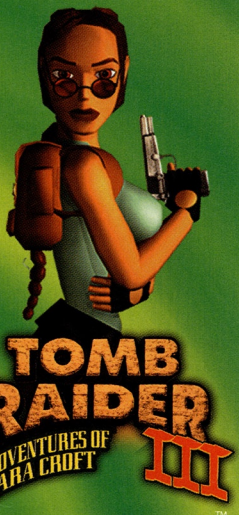
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TRACKING

Keeping tabs on the **latest peripherals**



Altec Lansing has released its ADA70 Digital PowerCube multimedia speaker system. The Digital PowerCube is a three-piece system with a USB connection for any PC USB port. The system features Altec Lansing's proprietary technology to deliver digital audio from the USB system. This allows streaming of digital data directly from the sound source to the subwoofer, where the digital-to-audio conversion occurs, enabling the conversion to take place with little to no distortion.



ACT Labs has finally started distributing the RS, a steering wheel that is expandable to work with nearly every console and PC. It retails for $59.99 and comes with one system cartridge. Consumers will be able to purchase additional system cartridges for $19.99, enabling them to use the same wheel on all of their home systems. The rugged design includes foot pedals and a fake-leather-covered steering wheel. The wheel lacks digitally controlled force-feedback, but the effect of pull created by the mechanism is very convincing.

TOOLBOX

CHARACTER STUDIO R2

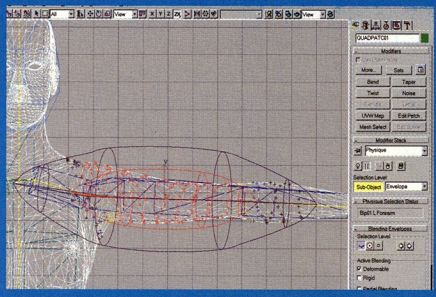
Two years ago, the original Character Studio was both tremendously exciting and oddly frustrating. A set of two plug-ins, Biped and Physique for Kinetix's own 3D Studio MAX, it enabled animators to create lifelike character animation using the highly specialized inverse kinematics of Biped. It then used the Physique modifier — a kind of specialized Bones — to bend and deform a 3D character realistically.

Unfortunately, both components had drawbacks: Biped was practically locked into a footstep-driven animation system, which was often useful but could also get in the way. Meanwhile, properly binding a polygon mesh to a Physique skeleton was a nightmarish, time-consuming process of chasing down individual stray vertices and manually reassigning them to the underlying structure.

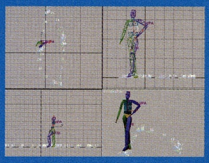
Fortunately, many of these problems have been rectified in Character Studio R2. To begin with, Physique has dumped its old, neo-Bones approach in favor of a system of relatively intuitive "deformation envelopes." Now an animator can actually see how the underlying armature is going to affect a section of the mesh — and fix it. The envelopes can be modified in any number of ways — for instance, changing the shape of a cross section, or even adding new cross sections as needed. It's still somewhat time-consuming to get everything tuned just right (and things still deform in odd ways every once in a while), but overall, the process is much less hit-or-miss.

Biped, as well, is more flexible. In addition to CStudio's own native ".bip" motion files, animators now have the option of importing Biovision motion capture files (other file types may be supported later). Furthermore, options for free-form, more traditionally keyframed animation have been greatly expanded, and animations can be added in "layers," which can be toggled on and off (for example, add a nodding head to a walk cycle, then modify or just trash the nod later if you decide you don't like it — without having to rekey every frame). There are even tools for interpolating body positions in between animation segments.

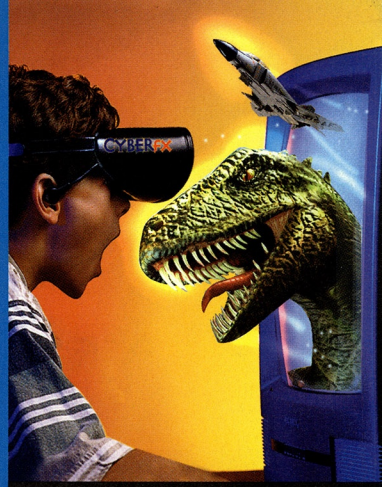
All in all, Character Studio R2 is a major improvement, adding a lot of utility to an already groundbreaking product. It's no substitute for good animation skills, of course, but it is a big help.



Here's the real reason to crow about Character Studio R2 — "deformation envelopes" make the process of skinning a Biped armature a whole lot easier



The ability to import motion capture data and edit it makes CStudio R2 a boon for animators



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BIG IN **JAPAN**

Next Generation reports from videogaming's motherland

Retroplaying



Though it looks a lot like a Super NES game from here, rest assured that the environments are fully 3D and that the maps will be huge, requiring umpteen hours of exploration

For a glimpse of how *Final Fantasy VII* might have turned out had Square not embraced CGI, look no further than *Dragonquest VII*. Square's archenemy Enix recently released the first batch of screens for its eagerly awaited sequel. At first sight, the RPG looks rather underwhelming, but there are some hidden surprises. Beneath the distinctly 16-bit appearance lies a realtime 3D environment, fully rotatable, offering multiple camera views and polygonal cut scenes. Though in some respects already looking somewhat dated next to Square's seminal *Final Fantasy VII*, *Dragonquest* has an appeal that lies more in its retro-traditional feel (the music, for example, is coded rather than streamed) rather than in the sheer weight of its text or special effects. There's an emphasis on exploration too, which is something that is not necessarily missed but certainly missing from Square's more linear effort.

There's no word yet on the U.S. release, but Enix hopes to have the Japanese *Dragonquest VII* finished by summer 1999 and is projecting sales of more than five million in Japan alone. Whether Western gamers will take to the old-school feel after sampling the cinematic delights of Square's *Final Fantasy VIII* remains to be seen.

Viewing

In what has to be one of the most bizarre ads (even for Japanese TV), Sega is taking an ironic look at the failure of Saturn. Aired just days after the official Dreamcast announcement, the ad stars Yukawa Hidekazu, Sega's senior director, who has a tough time coming to terms with the demise of his company's aging black box.

The ad begins with Hidekazu catching the tail-end of a conversation between two schoolchildren who claim Sega is out of date and praise the competition — the "Playsta" — a rather thinly veiled reference to Sony's own PlayStation nickname, Plasta.

Next Hidekazu rushes to Sega HQ and asks his employees if this could possibly be true. They bow their heads in shame. Depressed and apparently in shock, Hidekazu takes a taxi to Kabukicho in Shinjuku (a recreation area) and enters a baseball batting center, hoping to swing his troubles away. But he can't forget the cutting remarks of the children. Later he is to be found wandering the streets, seemingly drunk, where he accidentally bumps into a member of the Japanese mafia, who chins him. Returning home, his wife runs to his aid as a voice-over commands, "Senior Director Yukawa Hidekazu, stand up!!"

Next month, Nintendo's Hiroshi Yamauchi meets an untimely end at the hands of hooded *Zelda* fans armed with hefty staffs ...

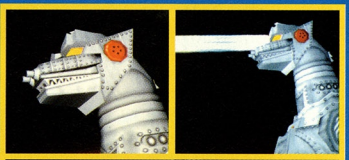


SELLING BIG IN JAPAN THIS MONTH

1. Brave Fencer Mushashiden (Square)
2. F-Zero X (Nintendo)
3. XI (Sony)
4. Deep Fear (Sega)
5. Dekotora no Densetsu (Human)
6. Tokimeki Quiz (Konami)
7. Jikkyo Winning Eleven 3 (Konami)
8. IQ Intelligent Cube (Sony)
9. Double Cast (Sony)
10. Yusokyoku (Pack-In Soft)

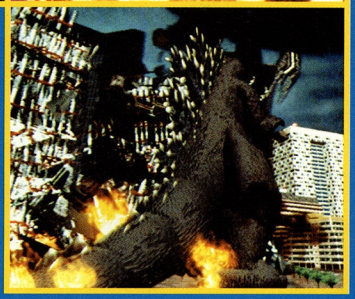
Sega's monster mash











Sega Enterprises recently announced that it will release a full Dreamcast *Godzilla* title by the end of the year. Tentatively called *Godzilla Generations*, the game allows the player to stomp Japanese cities to rubble, with resistance from the amusingly underarmed Japan Armed Self Defense Forces and, of course, the rogues gallery of Godzilla enemies taken from the Japanese movies.

The levels afford Sega an excellent opportunity to showcase the polygon-pushing muscle of Dreamcast (which, by current estimates, exceeds Sega's own revolutionary Model 3 coin-op), with as many as 30 to 40 vehicles on screen at any one time. Details of the exact nature of the gameplay are under wraps, but it is known that the game will be compatible with the VMS title, *Atsumete Godzilla — Kaijuu Daishugoh*, which has been on sale at select movie theaters since July 11. Players can grow and train their Godzilla monster on the VMS, Tamagotchi-style, and link them up for fights. The creatures can then be uploaded to Dreamcast, presumably for multiplayer as well as single-player games. The VMS Godzilla sold out the day it went on sale in Japan and has already become something of a collector's item among the otaku — despite the lukewarm reception to the Hollywood movie, which the Japanese have dubbed "unconventional."

The creature model is especially impressive, as are the enemies, which include Mechagodzilla (above). Let's hope the game is better than the movie ...





***Godzilla* shows off the polygon power of Sega's new machine, with detailed creature models and a city teeming with vehicles**

MONSTERS CLAIM TOKYO



Pocket Monsters continue to invade the Japanese consciousness and the high street. Nintendo released the first of its three Pocket Monsters N64 titles, *Pokemon Stadium*, simultaneously with the opening of a dedicated Pokemon store in Tokyo and the release of an anime movie titled *Pocket Monster Myushi's Counter-Attack*.

The release date for the game was carefully timed to keep Japanese children from skipping school to claim their digital devils, and the store was standing room only from the minute it opened, containing such sought-after items as the rare Pikachu edition of Game Boy Light (adorned with the tiny yellow monster). It's only a matter of time before Nintendo's hyper-successful franchise makes its way to U.S. shores — first on Game Boy and then on N64.



Sega's VMS Godzilla title, *Atsumete Godzilla — Kaijuu Daishugoh*, sold out within hours of release

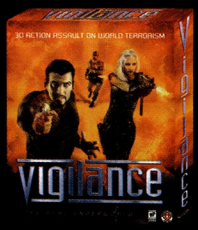






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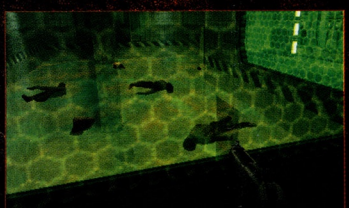
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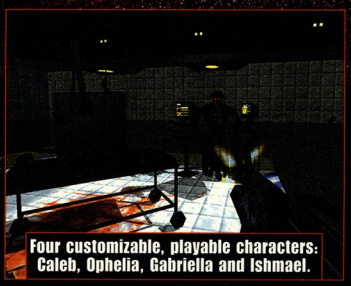
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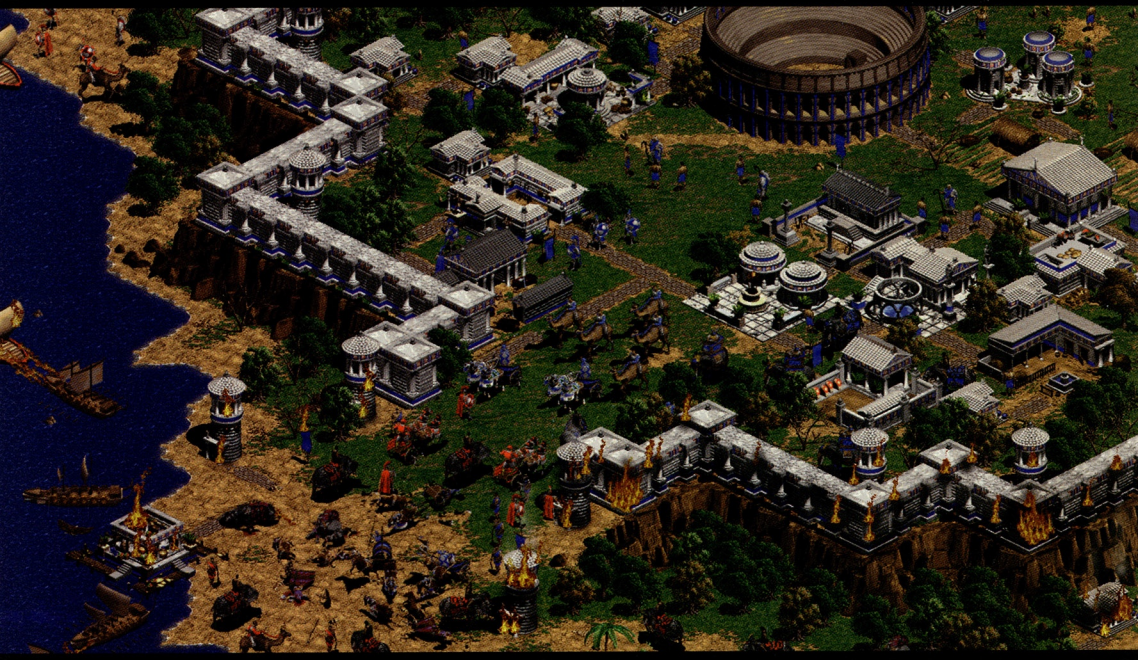
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Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine PC **D2** DREAMCAST
Jet Force Gemini N64 **Rayman 2** MULTI **Heretic II** PC

ALPHAS

In-depth looks at the latest and greatest from the development front

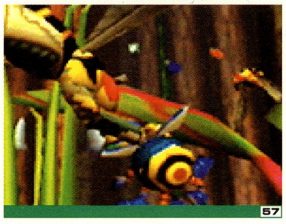












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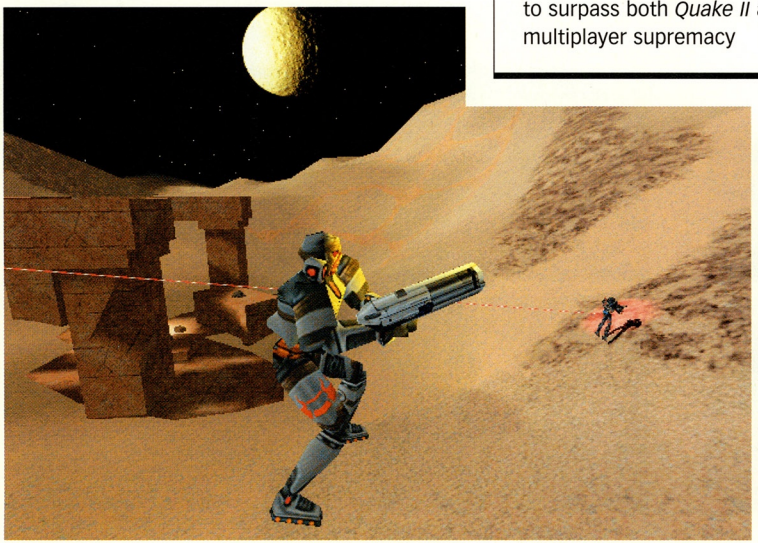






Starsiege Tribes

Out of nowhere comes a game that threatens to surpass both *Quake II* and *Unreal* for multiplayer supremacy







***Tribes'* paintball-style team play is unrivaled, enabling up to 32 players to participate in full-scale assaults over enormous terrains**

Throw away any preconceptions you may have about Dynamix and its recent work (*Red Baron 2*, say). Since the reorganization of Sierra, Dynamix is a new company, with a new focus — and judging from its latest game, *Starsiege Tribes*, it may very well have created its best game to date.

Tribes takes multiplayer gaming into an entirely untraversed direction, with gameplay that is both immediately familiar and completely original. Although the control will be familiar to anyone who has played *Quake*, gone are most of the limitations of an enclosed environment. Instead, players can explore cavernous buildings as well as vast exteriors that stretch for miles, creating totally new gameplay paradigms. Additionally, the game can be played in either first-person *Quake* style or third-person, a la *Tomb Raider*.

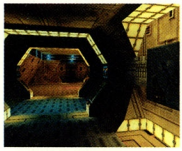


***Tribes* is played from two selectable perspectives: first-person — for *Quake* players — as well as third-person for *Tomb Raider* fans**

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Sierra On-Line
Developer:	Dynamix
Release Date:	Q4 1998
Origin:	U.S.



Hits are registered on the appropriate parts of the body, making room for some impressive deaths. Depending on which weapon you use, the effects are multiplied





***Tribes* enables clans to build their own fortresses and defenses**

It is expected that the game will support up to 32 simultaneous players over the Internet or LAN, and a complex chat system that utilizes custom speech is also planned.

But how can *Tribes* possibly overtake the *Quake*-style juggernauts? Gameplay. Imagine if creating a clan meant designing and arming a fortress, creating a clan crest, communicating from a command center, and organizing military tactics to conquer one's enemies. Now imagine all of that happens in real time, with troop transports, fast land vehicles, recon planes, and mounted gun turrets. Also imagine being able to use any of these objects at any time. That is exactly what *Tribes* will provide. Some battles may feature a player at the wheel of a troop transport while teammates hop in and shoot at pursuing enemies. If the action gets too intense, players can jump out of the vehicle and starting running on foot. This is no *Quake* clone.

Dynamix did its homework, seeking to go far beyond current games while featuring the most popular game mechanics of the last few years. For instance, every weapon has a sniping mode with selectable ranges and various abilities. That's important since the game takes players into tight hallways as well as large valleys, where sniping weapons are crucial. Each player has a particular armor type, ranging from light to heavy. Of course this has an effect on the player's speed and agility. Also, small jump jets are placed on the backs of all players, giving them limited flying abilities. It is completely normal to see players sniped out of the sky as they try to fly up to a ledge or structure.

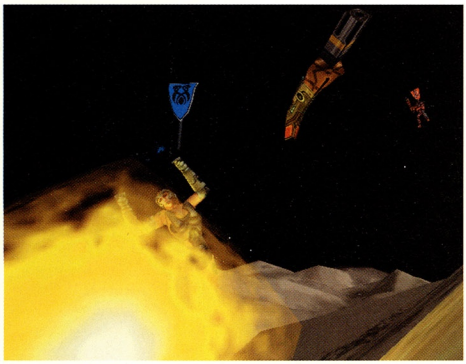




Jump jets and hovercrafts help players negotiate extraneous elevations

Tribes was conceived as a multiplayer game, and squad-level tactics are crucial for every mission. There is a definite hierarchy that forms when playing a game, and each squad has a definite leader. It is the only way to succeed. And it is this emphasis on team play that sets *Tribes* so far apart

Tribes will feature **the most popular game mechanics** of the last few years



Two flag bearers duke it out for passage to home base, but unfortunately for the blue team, their flag bearer takes a direct hit

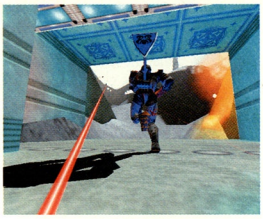


With so many players in a clan, it's feasible to split them into sub-divisions. In this case, a defensive player draws fire away from his base





Snipers have the upper hand from higher elevations (top)



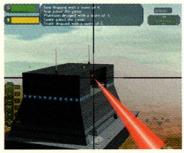
from other games. There are moments during the game, for example, when explosions erupt in every direction and a squad leader is yelling for his troops to forge ahead, which create intense emotional feelings in players — this is rarely found in other games. The version shown to **Next Generation** had yet to implement the single-player game, but with the weight of the project on its multiplayer mode, it is unlikely that too many consumers will purchase the game for its solitary play.

Dynamix seems to be following an otherwise typical recipe for success, providing gamers with level editing, true terrain landscapes, motion captured animation, and seamless transitions from exteriors to interiors. The system requirements are only a fraction of those needed to run games like *Unreal*, yet the game offers so much more diversity. Just about every preferred rendering method will be included in the final product, from OpenGL to a quick and impressive software version. Everything in the game has some amount of customization. From skins to actual logos, groups of players will have more control over their clan presence than in any other game. By digitizing their speech, players can also personalize the combat dialogue. Now players can recognize their friends' voices during games to prevent friendly fire amid chaos.

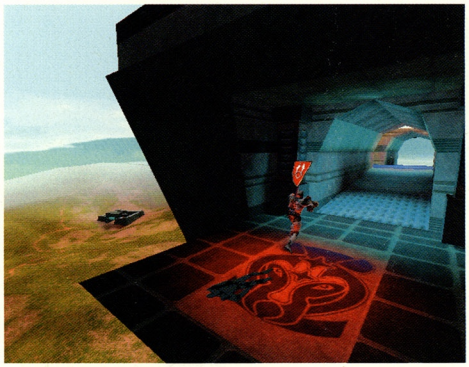
Dynamix is indeed making a well-deserved comeback. Gamers not so long in the tooth will remember that the company used to be a leader in 3D gaming during the mid-'80s, with its groundbreaking tank game *Stellar 7* for the Commodore 64 and Apple II, as well as a series of successful 3D follow-ups. And unless Dynamix manages to seriously disturb the delicate balance of the game's current design, the company should introduce players to the next level of multiplayer gaming. NG







Levitating fortresses are harder to attack without the aid of aircrafts



Almost home! However, trouble lies ahead, as a long-forgotten enemy has been camping in the shadows since the start of the game

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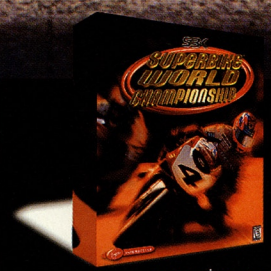
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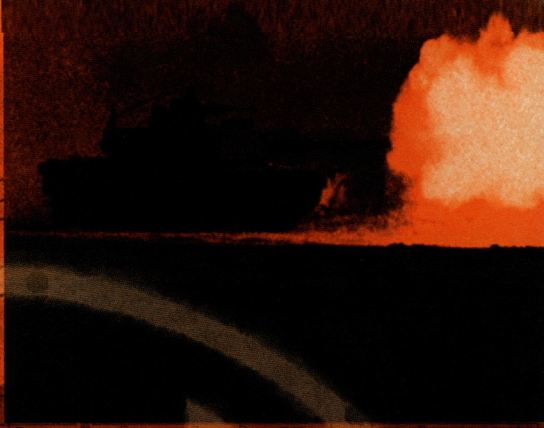
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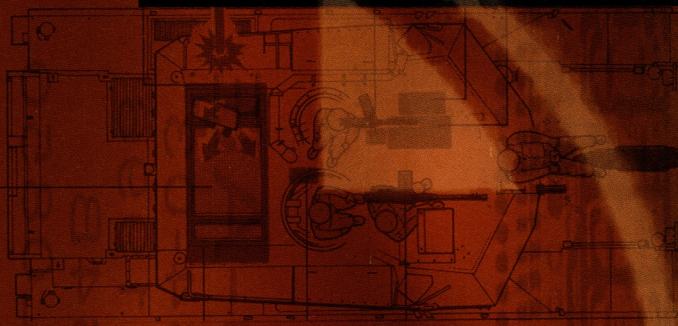
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RECOIL

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designed for WINDOWS®95 CD-ROM

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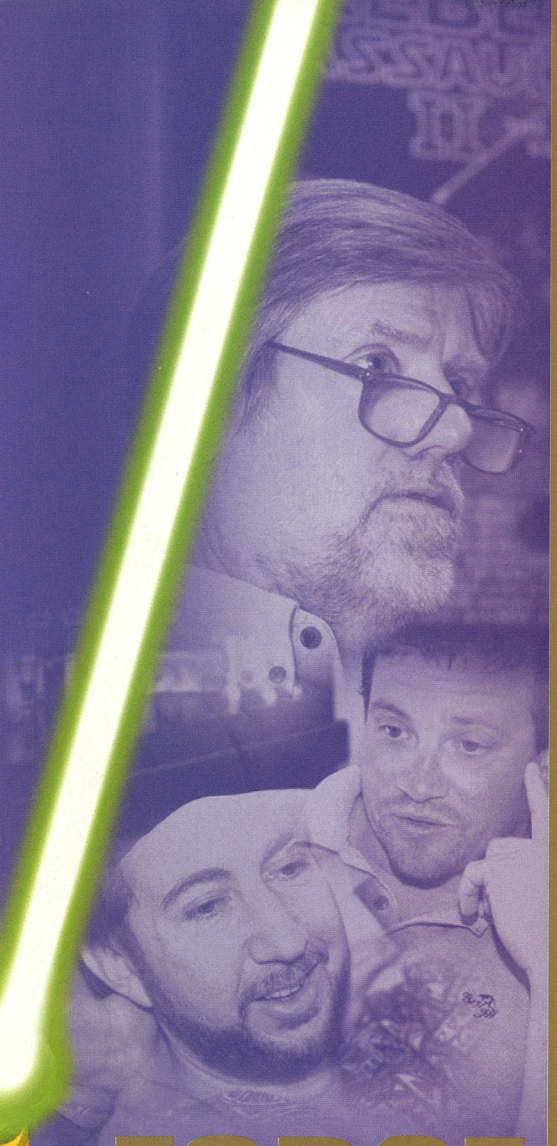






Playable demo available at: www.vie.com/recoil


TOUR DE



FORCE

Next Generation tours the backlot of LucasArts studios for exclusive interviews with the three men who will help shape the immediate and long-term direction of the company with the best licenses on Earth

If you live to be a hundred you may never meet anyone as intense as Hal Barwood. LucasArts' multitalented Renaissance man stares out at the world over the rim of his glasses with a laserlike glare, fielding questions from journalists as if swatting flies. Maybe he's been around Harrison Ford a little too much, or maybe

"We have gone beyond cinematic. What we have now is a **continuous, fictional world"**
Hal Barwood, project leader

he's just not overly happy to be talking to yet another hack, but Barwood (like Ford) will gladly leave interviewer and interviewee perched on the edge of an uncomfortable silence for several seconds without batting an eyelid. But get him onto something he can think around, and he opens up to reveal pearls of wisdom as long in the making as the careers of his more famous contemporaries and one-time colleagues, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas.

Barwood has, at one time or another, been a programmer, a screenwriter, a movie producer, a director, and a team leader. He scripted the screenplay for Steven Spielberg's first feature film, *Sugarland Express*, as well as produced and wrote the '80s fantasy hit *Dragonslayer*. In fact, it was while on the set of *Dragonslayer* in 1980 that Barwood rekindled his interest in videogames on the tiny LCD screen of an HP41 calculator, where he programmed a simple game — an interest that had been sidelined in the 1960s as he embarked upon his film career. During that time, though, he bought an Apple II and wrote an RPG — indulging his writing talents as well as getting a taste of the harsher realities of videogame publishing (just as he put the finishing touches on his game, the Apple II market tanked). He still has the game somewhere — a reminder of what might have been had it sold, as well as a neat summation of who Hal Barwood is — a storyteller, a technician, and a dreamer. But now, Barwood has returned to his first love, holed up in the northeast corner of the unmarked LucasArts building in San Rafael, California, midway through his third *Indiana Jones* game.

Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine obeys the first law of Hollywood — give the people what they want — in the form of a hero that's been begging for



Talented individuals (from top): Hal Barwood, Aric Wilmunder, and Steve Dauterman are key to the success of LucasArts

INDIANA JONES
AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE





Infernal Machine has a rich variety of environments



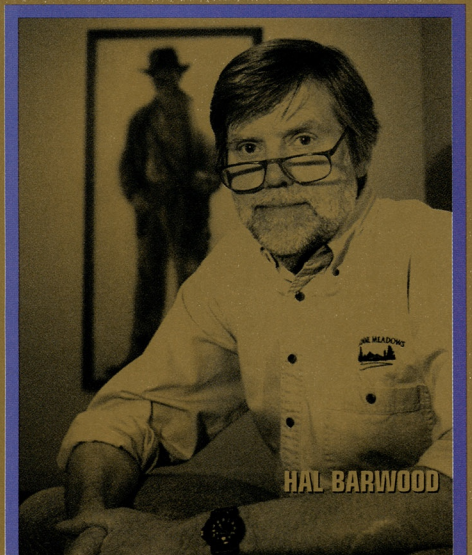
Hal Barwood is especially proud of some of the technical feats his team has managed to achieve with this 3D Indy outing, such as true 16-bit color and textures that become more detailed the closer you get. Levels include white-water rafting, a mine-cart chase, a jeep ride, and a highly detailed Russian freighter, as well as a collection of more conventionally "Indy" environments, like temples, tombs, and caverns. The version seen by Next Generation was still early, but the smooth frame rate and superbly rendered Indy capture perfectly the atmosphere of the movies,

a digital update since Core blazed the trail with the eponymous Lara Croft. It may be a little late, arriving after no less than three *Tomb Raider* titles have already laid the groundwork, but Barwood is confident that he and his team can offer the world something new with the first 3D appearance of the original swashbuckling archaeologist.

"I got excited by *Tomb Raider*," he admits, "and the reason I did wasn't necessarily because of the way the whole thing was done, but rather because I realized that we had suddenly liberated 3D from the world of shooters, and I believe that's a big step forward."

The next step, he believes, is a natural one for a company that has made its money from very specific divisions between action and adventure. The "liberation" of 3D that he's talking about will allow *Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine* to be more than *Tomb Raider* with a Y chromosome. It will allow for the seemingly opposed genres of action and adventure to meet on equal terms.

Set in 1947, at the dawn of the Cold War era, Indy must save the world from the Soviets, who are seeking to harness the secrets of the mythical Tower of Babel to produce a devastating weapon that could tip the delicate balance of power. Teaming up once more with Sophia Hapgood (last seen in *Fate of Atlantis*), the player embarks on an epic adventure, drawing a web of red lines across the map as Indy makes his way through some 17 levels that include white-water rafting, a jeep ride, and a mine-cart section (and yes, it's a cliche, but at least it's Lucas' cliche).



> **"I got excited by *Tomb Raider*.** I realized that we had suddenly liberated 3D from the world of shooters, **and that's a big step forward"**
>
> **Hal Barwood**

Barwood is reveling in the opportunity to finally bring all the movie elements into a game. Though there are some 8,000 lines of dialogue in *Infernal Machine*, players will find much of their time divided between fighting the Communists with whip, revolver, and explosives, and solving complex, environment-based puzzles. At four critical junctures, interaction with other characters will require the more familiar point-and-click dialogue skills, but as Barwood notes, if you watch the Indiana Jones movies, you realize that Indy is a man of precious few words. In this respect, this latest attempt to bring Spielberg's hero to the digital screen should mirror closely the action/adventure balance so successfully employed in the films.

Knowing this, and knowing Barwood's own background, you might expect him to spout endless radio-friendly quotes on how videogames are snuggling up to movies, but you'd be wrong. Despite directing the FMV sequences for Vince Lee's *Rebel Assault* game, Barwood is happy to throw a spanner in the works by





The mine-cart level is a big cliche, but at least it's Indy's cliche

with the environments more tightly mapped than *Tomb Raider* to avoid the dreaded specter of players running aimlessly around in search of a single switch.

Developed on PC, *Infernal Machine* naturally sports a multiplayer mode, though it won't be a deathmatch. Players will be expected to help one-another through the specially created scenarios, in the guise of Indy avatars. Competition is limited to capture the flag races and treasure hunts through trap-laden levels small enough to provide a fast burst of Indy action, and Barwood is limiting the number of players to four, *Gauntlet* style.

The game is due for completion by the holidays, but it could slip until Q1 1999. Barwood promises more than just a *Tomb Raider* clone, and he'll need to deliver something more if he's to avoid the inevitable comparisons.





claiming that, if anything, games are moving in the opposite direction.

"The cool thing about modern gaming, and you'll see this with *Infernal Machine*," he says, "is that it's not cinematic. We have gone beyond cinematic. What we have now is a continuous experience in a fictional world. I shy away from the term 'virtual' because it has such creepy connotations, but what I find interesting about *Tomb Raider*, and about the games we're working on now, is that they're not cinematic — it's just a continuous tissue instead of these set pieces — it's a very vivid experience. You can't see this on Saturday morning television, you can't see it on prime-time television, and you can't go to the movies to see this stuff. It only happens in games. I believe that interactive entertainment has found a means of expression which is unique."

It owes that means of expression largely to recent technical advances in realtime 3D, but as LucasArts moves toward the millennium, Barwood can see a day when technology is transparent — much as the camera is in a movie. The company has always been technically innovative, but it's a tribute to the power of its games that technology has rarely overshadowed the end result. As the rest of the world laps up frame rates and polygon power, the corridors of LucasArts are filled instead with impassioned talk of plot, of character, and of (most importantly) — fun. Technology matters, but it's regarded merely as a tool, a necessary evil that must be tamed, not worshipped. Maintaining that attitude in the increasingly complex and competitive technical arena is the responsibility of a man who has been in videogames for as long as he, or anyone at LucasArts, can remember.

As you enter Aric Wilmunder's office, you'll notice a shelf right in front of you.

> **"The goal is** to be able to provide the tools to the designers so **that they don't have to worry about the technology"**
>
> **Aric Wilmunder,** director of technology

On it are some seriously old games from the days when merely having any graphics at all was considered state of the art. But he didn't pick them up at a garage sale, he helped make them. And back in the day, he designed, wrote, programmed, *and* produced the art for the games — he even wrote the music. While Hal Barwood was writing scripts for Spielberg, Wilmunder was desperately trying to coax meaningful graphics and sound from the first Z80 processors — he succeeded enough to be scooped up by Atari in 1981. Sixteen years later he's the director of technology at LucasArts.

Congenial and soft-spoken, Wilmunder is the opposite of the in-your-face 3D evangelists that pop up at trade shows. He worked for Atari with Lucasfilm

ROGUE SQUADRON



After the poor critical showing of *Shadows of the Empire*, Lucas returns to its golden goose for another N64 outing. With technical help from Factor 5, *Rogue Squadron* could reap both critical acclaim and commercial success when it is released this month.

The idea for the game came from many of the criticisms leveled at *Shadows*. Everyone, it seemed, loved the first level, which had the player





Rogue Squadron* is a generational leap ahead of *Shadows of the Empire



Old games: Wilmunder still has the original game design document for *Maniac Mansion*

on the original *Koronis Rift* and *Rescue on Fractalus* (the first game to use voxel technology), and he was part of the team that invented the SCUMM engine, first seen in the 1987 Lucas point-and-click adventure, *Maniac Mansion*. In one way or another, Wilmunder has been involved in just about all of LucasArts' landmark titles, working on the fast 3D technology that allowed *X-Wing* to storm the charts; overseeing the difficult transition from art-lead adventures to polygon-hungry first-person games in the form of *Dark Forces* and *Jedi Knight*; and developing tools that allow artists and designers to work closely with programmers to fulfill their vision.

"The goal," he says, "is to be able to provide the tools to the designers so that they don't have to worry about the technology. If George or Steven had to worry about how fast to turn the crank on a camera, or whether the film stock they're using is going to work, they wouldn't be able to focus on the movie. To continue the film metaphor, you could say that the difference between, say, *The Great Train Robbery* and *Birth of a Nation* is that filmmakers are beginning to think artistically rather than technologically."

Though ultimately secondary to the design considerations, technology has both helped and hindered the company. It took seven years for the technology to arrive in a form that George Lucas considered advanced enough to carry a game based on the Indy movie — in this case *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* — and another two years after that (in 1991) before the company produced its first *Star Wars* title for the NES. It's no accident that the company has chosen 1998 as the year to finally bring *Indiana Jones* into 3D — until now, it wouldn't have been able to do the character, or the richly detailed period environments, justice.

> **"Atari was throwing money around** like crazy — they just wanted to be in there, working with the **company that created *Star Wars*"**
>
> **Aric Wilmunder**

And Wilmunder remembers how *Ballblazer* relied on a particular quirk of the Atari 800 chipset to produce the simulated 3D play area. It left the team in a sweat trying to think of a way to port the game to the Commodore 64 and Apple II. It found a way, of course, but all of LucasArts' early titles were originally designed with Atari technology in mind, and it was Atari that published them. Indeed, without Atari money, Lucasfilm may never have branched out into the world of interactive entertainment — certainly not as quickly as it did.

"Atari was just throwing money around like crazy — they just wanted to be in there, working with the company that created *Star Wars*," Wilmunder recalls. "They were heady days. I remember at one point, someone put in a purchase request for a Saturn V Launch Vehicle just to see how far up the chain of command it would go before someone spotted it. It got up to one of the VPs before it was questioned. He came over and said, 'Look here, what exactly are we doing with this?' They were just crazy times."

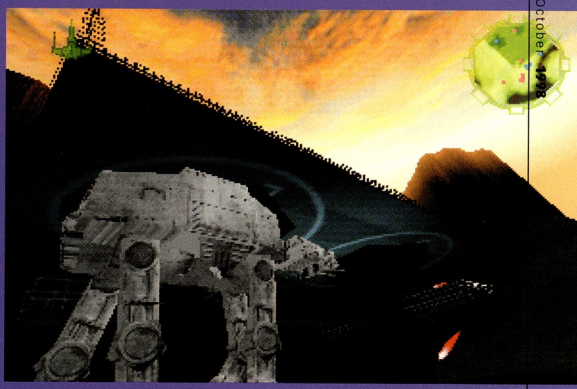
For Wilmunder, technology goes in cycles, or, as he describes them, "battles." When he first started out, he was fighting the battle for disks over



flying a snowspeeder over the ice planet Hoth, engaging with AT-ATs and Imperial Walkers. In *Rogue*, players fly as Luke over 16 levels that feature many of the more familiar moons and planets from the movies, including a battle over Taloran, the cloud city. The game takes place between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. The gameplay is straight shooter, but the level designs require Luke to be a team player and wisely use his wingman, the erstwhile Wedge.







Clean textures and minimal fogging bode well for Lucas' second N64 *Star Wars* title

tapes, then years later the battle for CDs over disks. Then there were the sound card battles that came with stereo sound and the embracing of 16-bit technology, and more recently, the battle for 3D. His job is, he believes, to help LucasArts win those battles as quickly as possible to allow the artists to utilize more advanced technologies for their art. The 3D battle is going to take a little longer to resolve, he believes, but he knows it will reach the point within the next few years where the tools, standards, and expertise are available to provide a creative environment largely free of technical restraints.

"Those were heady days. I remember at one point, someone put in a **purchase request for a Saturn V Launch Vehicle ..."**

Arlc Wilmunder

When that day comes, LucasArts, if Wilmunder has anything to say about it, will be ideally poised to reap the benefits. Despite some notable critical failures, the company has a willingness to experiment with and broaden its technical and creative capabilities, as demonstrated by its recent history. Already regarded as the very best storyteller in the business with its point-and-click heritage, Lucas has had notable success with the *X-Wing* and *TIE-Fighter* space combat sims, and following the release of *Dark Forces* in 1995, instant credibility in the then-emerging first-person arena. The company even tried its hand at strategy games, though with limited success (*Afterlife* fell flat, and the recent *Rebellion* — which relied on outside help — was weighed down with a clumsy interface and a sluggish realtime engine).

In fact, it's hard to find a genre that LucasArts hasn't tried. It certainly surprised everyone last year with the PlayStation fighter, *Star Wars: Masters of Teras Kasi*. It was a gutsy (and perhaps a little foolhardy) move to stand toe-to-toe with Namco in that genre, but it has given the company yet more experience — experience that will be shown to be critical come 1999 — the year that George Lucas will release the first of his *Star Wars* prequel movies. Needless to say, LucasArts is already well into the development cycle with the prequel games.

Before the prequel titles appear, however, there are two *Star Wars* games on the near horizon, currently under the watchful eye of LucasArts' director of development, Steve Dauterman. He's the guy who picks the winners (and occasionally, the losers) from the game designs proposed every year internally, either from teams who have just finished a project or new teams looking to produce their next game. Every concept of recent years has passed through Dauterman's "In" box, and he routinely rejects as many as he approves. If Wilmunder is the technical watchdog of LucasArts, then Dauterman is his opposite number on the creative side.

Steve is looking a little stressed these days, and well he might. He has at least three *Star Wars* titles on the go, along with *Rogue Squadron* only months from completion; the latest point-and-click, *Grim Fandango*, winding up; and, of course, *Indiana Jones* at the halfway

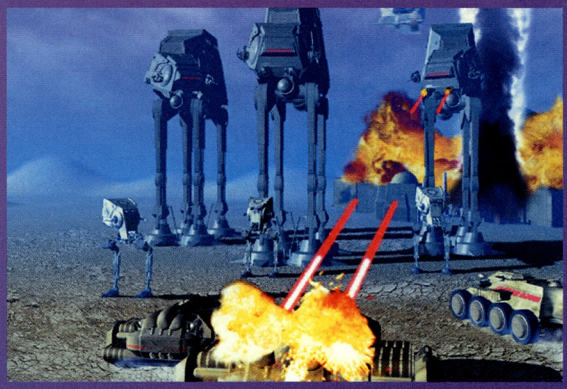


FORCE COMMANDER





Lucas is trying hard to differentiate *Force Commander* from C&C



This *Command & Conquer* meets *Star Wars* game was originally slated for a 1998 release but has been put back following last minute changes with the plot, courtesy of the forthcoming prequel movies.

When the game is eventually released, players can expect 3D environments and the option to play as either the rag-tag armies of the Rebel Alliance or the technologically superior Galactic Empire. The missions take place over a time period that stretches

stage. There are also a number of other projects with unfamiliar names scribbled on a whiteboard that hangs on his wall.

And therein lies the challenge for Dauterman. LucasArts' diversity is his responsibility — it's up to him to ensure that the company doesn't rely solely on the golden *Star Wars* franchise but instead takes the calculated creative and commercial risks needed to maintain an edge in an increasingly conservative market. "Whenever I'm looking at a concept or a design document, I'm looking for something original," he says. "*Star Wars* is a whole different sort of area — it's the crown jewels of the company that we like to take care of, do the best thing we can, but it tends to be less original. That's why games like *Grim Fandango* are important to us — because they're recognizably different. You just won't see another game like that from another company. So with *Star Wars*, we often take an existing genre and put our spin on it, whereas with the other games, we have that opportunity to be a little more daring — a little more creative."

It doesn't always work out. Two recent failures, *Masters of Teras Kasi* and *Rebellion*, seemed to have slipped through the net. The problem with the *Star Wars* license in particular is that it has limitations in terms of plot and characters, and it has a very rigid universe that really doesn't allow for much innovation. In fact, LucasArts' biggest disappointments stem from being perhaps a little too safe. It's George's baby, after all, and nobody wants to drop it.

"It's funny, but when we all said, 'Hey, let's do a *Star Wars* fighting game' and everyone said 'yes,' we all thought it was a no-brainer. We went through the normal review process with our project leaders and everyone agreed, you know, that this would be a no-brainer. We just thought it would be fun to do, but it wasn't *Tekken*, and we didn't have any experience in that genre — certainly not eight or nine years like Namco. It wasn't bad, but it wasn't great, and after following on from games like *X-Wing* and *Jedi Knight*, I mean, people rightly expect a high level out of us, and not to just slap *Star Wars* on a genre and hope it works."

Earlier on during **Next Generation**'s visit, Wilmunder described the *Star Wars* franchise as a "double-edged sword." It's great to have it, it's a rich source to draw from, but people are so fond of it that it's almost impossible to live up to their expectations. Like *Masters of Teras Kasi*, *Rebellion* drew strong fire from the press for essentially wasting the license, burying the *Star Wars* appeal beneath a hardcore strategy engine that would have looked more at home at Interactive Magic or SSI.

"It was interesting looking at the reviews for that one," notes Dauterman with a wry smile. "It went from people who loved it, to be honest, to people who really despised it — there was very little middle ground. Underneath it all I think it was a good game, but I'd agree that the presentation wasn't exactly the best we'd ever done, but we were working with a team outside of LucasArts."

LucasArts has worked with third parties all along, most recently with Factor 5 on the lackluster *Ballblazer Champions* for PlayStation. Far from ditching what had seemed to be a tree largely without fruit, Dauterman has hired the company once again for what is certain to be the next *Star Wars* blockbuster title — *Rogue Squadron* for N64.







Cut scenes add to the atmosphere, but they can't replace gameplay

from just short of *Star Wars* to just after the events of *Return of the Jedi*. They cover diverse terrains, from the equatorial forests of Yavin 4 to the Jawa-infested deserts of Tatooine, as well as the less familiar spice fields of Kessel and the arctic Coruscant.

LucasArts will need its wits about it if it is to go head-to-head with Westwood's all-conquering flagship, *Command & Conquer*. Camera options such as tilt, pan, and orbit, along with 3D acceleration, should at least allow *Force Commander* to hold its head up technically, but strategy is a new game for Lucas, and it'll need more than *Star Wars* units to win critical acclaim for a title that many would argue should've been done years ago.



"Factor 5 has a great working relationship with us, and to be honest, they have great technical skill — they're really great coders," he explains. "*Ballblazer Champions* was never meant to be this great big hit title, we just wanted to have a go at it. What the public doesn't see is that technical knowledge, and that's why we're working with them on *Rogue Squadron*. They love the N64 as well. Going back to when they were working on *Ballblazers*, all they could talk about was how they wanted to work with the Nintendo machine."

"Sure, we've learned some hard lessons from games like *Masters of Teras Kasi* and from *Shadows* — but we have learned them"

Steve Dauterman, director of development

Rogue Squadron is, in a nutshell, the first level of *Shadows of the Empire* blown out into a full game. LucasArts realized that combining first-person shooter, racing, and flight sims into one game may have been a stretch considering its lack of experience with the then brand new Nintendo hardware, but the feedback was pretty consistent: Everybody loved the first level, and they wanted more.

For the sixth time in the history of the company, LucasArts is allowing you to play as Luke (the others were the *Star Wars* console trilogy, the original *Star Wars Arcade*, and *Masters of Teras Kasi*), piloting a number of different craft over various planets and moons from the *Star Wars* universe. Though the engine is courtesy of Factor 5, the plot and much of the art comes from LucasArts. And although the environments are at this point fairly spartan, it's easy to see why Dauterman gave Factor 5 another shot. The textures are highly detailed, as are the models, and there's little of the telltale fogging and blurring that seemed to dog many of the first generation N64 titles. It certainly bodes well for the game that will act as a stand-in between now and the imminent 1999 release of the prequels.

And what of those games? Though he can't reveal anything at all about them right now, Dauterman admits that the experience gained from creating so many different genres over the past five years will certainly bear upon the content of the prequel titles.

"Part of my plan four or five years ago when developing this group," he contends, "both internally and externally, was about developing experience — experience in these different genres because the new movies are going to have all these elements, whether it's shooting or fighting or flying or whatever — you name it! You're going to have similar experiences to the original movie, and we wanted the experience internally of all these people who are capable of reproducing that. Sure, we've learned some hard lessons from games like *Masters of Teras Kasi* and from *Shadows* — but we have learned them."

LucasArts is a company that has been learning those lessons for 16 years, during which time it's produced no less than 73 games and has steadily built its expertise in every gaming genre (especially over the past five years). By the time you read this, *Rogue Squadron* will be complete, *Grim Fandango* will have single-handedly revived the point-and-click adventure game, and LucasArts will be looking forward to a bumper 1999. Hal Barwood will be even more intense as he prepares to ship *Infernal Machine*, Aric Wilmunder will be feverishly working to make himself redundant by creating tools that even a wookie could use, and Steve Dauterman will have nailed an extra whiteboard to his wall to accommodate the next round of games — many of which will delight, some of which may frustrate, and all of which will be, above all, unquestionably, unmistakably Lucas. NG



Along with the next round of *Star Wars* games, LucasArts is releasing *Behind the Magic*, a CD-ROM tour of the *Star Wars* movie universe that includes rare outtakes from the original movie and a report from the set of the 1999 prequel movie



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D2

Format:	Dreamcast
Publisher:	TBA
Developer:	Warp
Release Date:	TBA
Origin:	Japan

After scrapping the version for the canceled M2 console, Kenji Eno is working on the sequel to *D*. But can it sell Dreamcast?











In-game cut scenes (above left, center) introduce the mutants before seamlessly switching to the shooting (right)





The FMV opening presents terrorists, mutants, and downed airlines — and no, this isn't the "X-Files" game

D 2 has garnered a lot of attention — maybe too much. As one of few officially announced titles for Dreamcast, and as the project of Japan's creatively boisterous Kenji Eno, the circumstances surrounding the game have practically overshadowed the game itself.

That is, until now. The original *D* was a prerendered, puzzle-based adventure, but the sequel takes place in real time, with some prerendered and in-game cut scenes to advance the plot.

Laura returns as *D*'s main character; however, her vampire father is no longer the antagonist. In fact, the story is more akin to an "X-Files" episode. On a commercial flight, Laura's plane crash-lands in the snowy Canadian mountains after being struck by a meteorite. Laura is rescued from the crash and wakes in the hut, only to be confronted by two mutant beings.

At this point, the gameplay begins. Players must see Laura through a series of mutant battles in an attempt to help her find her way back to civilization. Players can explore the terrain in a movement mode, which enables them to walk in the environment or use a vehicle. Currently, only a snowmobile that seats two characters has been revealed, but more are expected. Also available to Laura will be a Global Positioning System, used to navigate the expansive and snowy terrain of *D2*.

When mutants are encountered, a second mode of play is introduced. This action mode is more like the gameplay of *Time Crisis*, where quick, noninteractive sequences introduce a set of creatures before enabling the player to blast them in classic shooting-gallery style. During the shooting sequences, players will be introduced to a variety of mutants, all



With Dreamcast's power, expect to see more realtime sunsets like this one





The shooting gallery gameplay is complete with green-blooded mutants

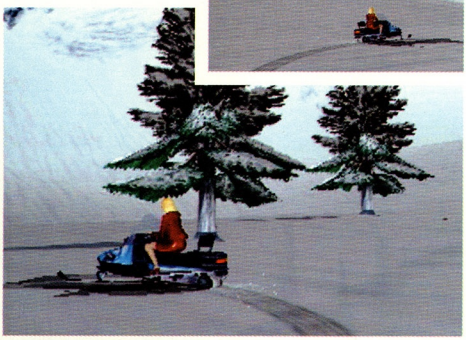
with their own distinctive weak points that must be discovered to dispose of them. The varying mutants may be easier to destroy with particular weapons, and *D2* will boast a range of weapons, including a flamethrower and shotgun.

Interestingly, the weather in this harsh winter environment is intended to be as deadly as the enemies. If snow is falling or heavy winds blowing, the player is advised not to travel very far from shelter. And when exposed to the extreme cold for a period of time, Laura will begin to lose health.

Eno is the first to admit that the team is just scratching the surface of the system's capabilities, but *D2* will certainly take advantage of the Dreamcast hardware. Players should expect a high frame rate (probably 60fps, although it has not yet been set), and the game will run at 640x480 resolution. Yet the real advances will be seen in the character models. Laura's in-game model has been built with more than 5,000 polygons, 2,000 of which have been used specifically in her face, so she can make realtime facial expressions. Backgrounds will also be more elaborate — for instance, a snowfall effect renders 3,000 snowflakes simultaneously.

The weather in this harsh winter environment is intended to be as deadly as the enemies





This snowmobile is just one of several vehicles Laura will need to operate if she plans to escape with her life

As the game is still early in development, it's too soon to tell if *D2* will deliver the little intangibles that together made up the gothic atmosphere that resonated from the first game. Considering the early elements of the action gameplay resemble an uninspired update of *Area 51* more than the revolutionary nature of *Enemy Zero*, **Next Generation** believes Eno and his crew at Warp have their work cut out for them. But with the seemingly limitless capabilities of Dreamcast and no immediate release date set, anything is possible. NG



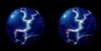


Laura's high-poly, in-game model is as close to prerendered as they come

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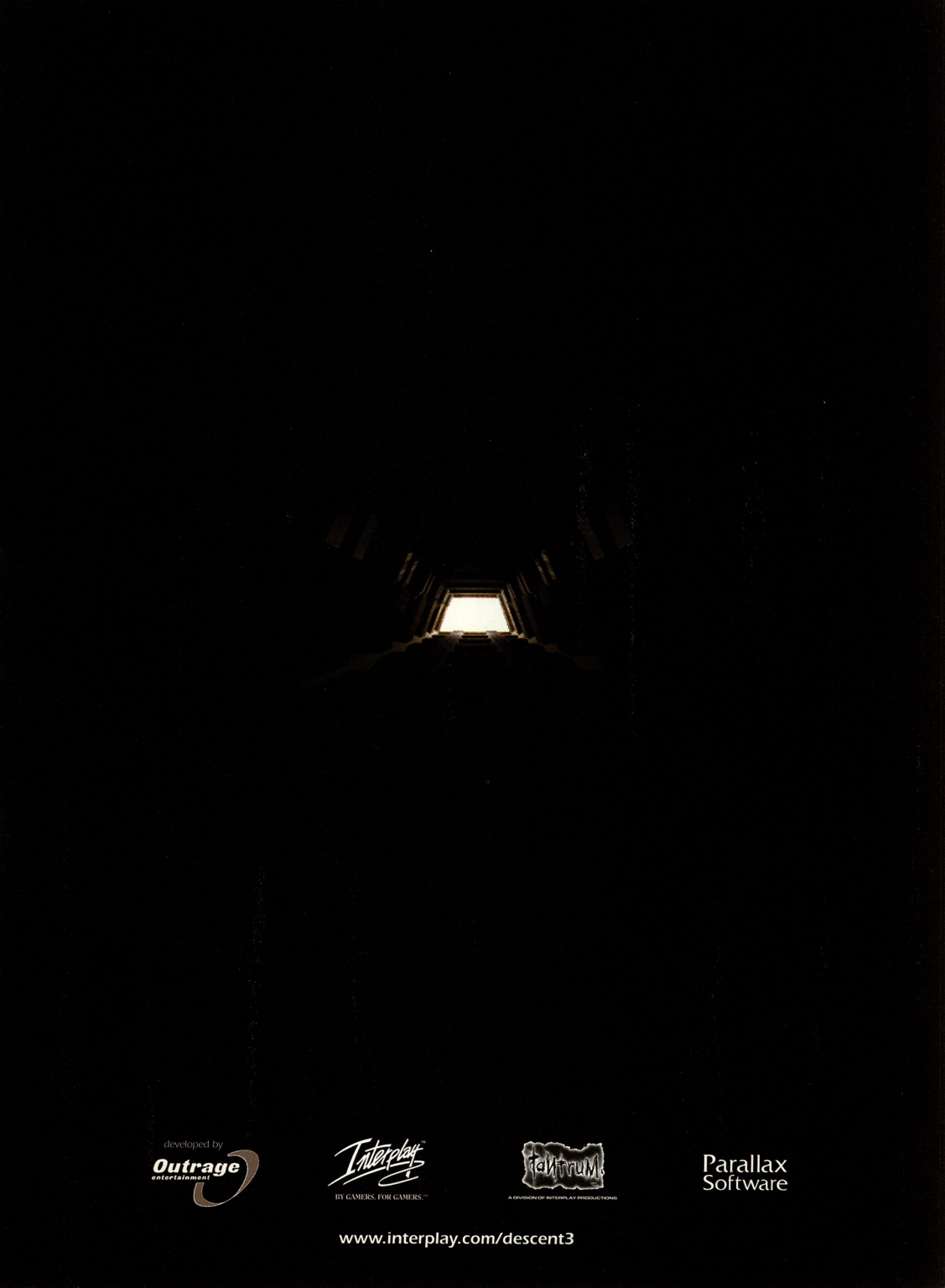
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Jet Force **Gemini**

Format:	**Nintendo 64**
Publisher:	**Nintendo**
Developer:	**Rare**
Release Date:	**TBA**
Origin:	**U.K.**

The seemingly unstoppable Rare looks set to continue the company's recent run of successful titles for Nintendo 64



Yet another example of the swish lighting effects and further evidence of the variety of alien life-forms awaiting termination



Announced just prior to the E3 show and shown only as a brief segment of Nintendo's looping promotional video sequence on its substantial projection screen, *Jet Force Gemini* passed an awful lot of people by. Yet Rare's potential-packed title warrants attention, promising to take all the elements of a classic shoot-'em-up and place them within a 3D polygonal world, with players viewing the action via a third-person perspective.

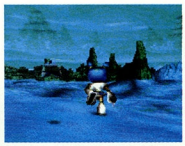
The game is set in an alien universe far, far away. Its delicate balance is under threat from the intergalactic crime lord Mizar, whose tyrannical reign must, naturally, be terminated. It would be a relatively simple task if it didn't involve having to battle his army of minions, which largely comprises crazed, gargantuan, insectlike, space-roaming beings. To succeed at this formidable and seemingly impossible (not to mention foolish) task, players can swap control between the three main characters — Juno, Vela, and Lupus the dog — and each of their individual skills must be fully exploited in order to ensure progression through the various levels.

To introduce some gameplay variety, the game alternates between frantic action and sectors requiring a more stealthy approach. Of course, secret areas revealing bonus items are to be found within the vast, freely explorable levels, with puzzle elements requiring some brain activity. Furthermore, having not forgotten the importance of weaponry in a shoot-'em-up, plenty of power-ups are obtainable to amplify the already-impressive artillery.





The game's alternating levels require players to switch between the main three characters, thus exploiting their individual attributes





The landscapes are in 3D, allowing players free exploration of the vast environments populated by disposable, buglike, alien baddies









Some of the more impressive effects in *Jet Force Gemini* can be found in the ambitious lighting used throughout, particularly for the game's many weapons

In typical Rare form, *Jet Force Gemini* also features multiplayer options to complement the one-player experience. Another interesting feature is the inclusion of dynamic weather conditions, forcing players to adapt their combat strategy depending on the climate's wildly unpredictable nature.

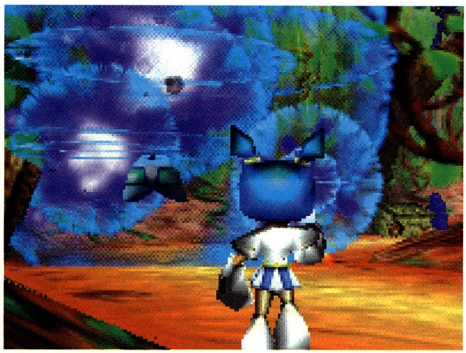
However, *Jet Force Gemini*'s most impressive aspect is its graphical quality. The E3 video footage revealed several excellently varied locations featuring highly detailed textures and impressively complex light sourcing — particularly noticeable in the game's fire effects. The designers have created a rich, colorful, lunarlike landscape, together with a series of space-age building interiors more akin to Rare's usual cartoonish look rather than the grave realism found in *Goldeneye*. Given the game's nature, this works particularly well.



Moving the plot along is a series of cinematic cut scenes, and an orchestral score further enhances the game's overall filmlike feel. Rare remains typically silent about other facets of the narrative.

E3 is fast becoming a platform for the U.K.-based developer/publisher to surprise the videogaming world by revealing new projects (*Perfect Dark* being the other show announcement this year). From what **Next Generation** has seen of *Jet Force Gemini* so far, plenty of destruction is assured, and, as usual, Rare has complemented the onscreen action with some truly impressive visuals.

Moreover, it provides weight to the argument that, in visual terms at least, the U.K. developer is now easily challenging the projects emerging from NCL's Kyoto offices — something that two years ago would have been considered highly improbable. Sadly, so many other N64 licensees still seem unable to even come close to the standards set by the premier duo. NG



Even at this stage, the levels seem hugely varied, with noticeably differing environments populated by bugs waiting to be killed

Heavy Gear 2

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	Activision
Release Date:	November 1998
Origin:	U.S.

Once a thinly veiled replacement for the *MechWarrior* franchise, the *Heavy Gear* series is starting to show characteristics all its own



Multiplayer games will support 10 Gears simultaneously



According to Producer Dave Georgson, the objective of the first *Heavy Gear* "was to make sure that the *MechWarrior* fans that we had created over the course of three games didn't abandon ship."

Not surprisingly then, the game was very much *MechWarrior* masked in a *Heavy Gear* skin. But with *Heavy Gear 2*, Georgson insists his team is even more committed to the license. And since the lead talent, the director, and Georgson himself are fresh in from other projects, they can concentrate on addressing the criticisms of the first game, with a wider variety of environments and a better storyline. Essentially, the game takes the plot of the film *Dirty Dozen* and sets it within the *Heavy Gear* universe. Players lead a disposable squad of Gears on a diversionary mission to support rebels on another colony called Caprice.

"You're cut off behind enemy lines," says Georgson. "Everything goes to hell in a hand basket once you get there. And you're not just fighting Gears because now we have Caprician and Earth technology, and it's all radically different."

Following this linear narrative, the game offers 40 single-player missions, roughly 30 multiplayer maps, and 10 training missions. With 30 animations per Gear, movement for those characters has become even more organic, as they can now crawl and lie down. The AI has also been vastly improved — squads will now break up into fire teams and support each other across open fields. They can also ambush and counterambush.

With more and more mech games hitting the scene, Activision knows that it needs to deliver tighter gameplay and a more varied experience than it did with its last effort. To its credit, *Heavy Gear 2* looks well on its way to accomplishing that. NG





The game will require a 3D accelerator card, making this detailed forest level possible





Unlike in the first *Heavy Gear*, the terrain will vary greatly. Expect to see plenty of mountainous topography (above)



The Gears are a bit smaller and far more agile than traditional lumbering Mechs. Note the scale of the Gear next to these soldiers


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DREAMFORGE
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THE INTENSOR™ SURVIVAL GUIDE

(Because we're not always going to be there to hold your trembling, sweaty little hand.)

PART ONE

Be warned: this is technology with a real "punch-you-in-the-gut-while-you're-not-looking" brand of sensitivity.

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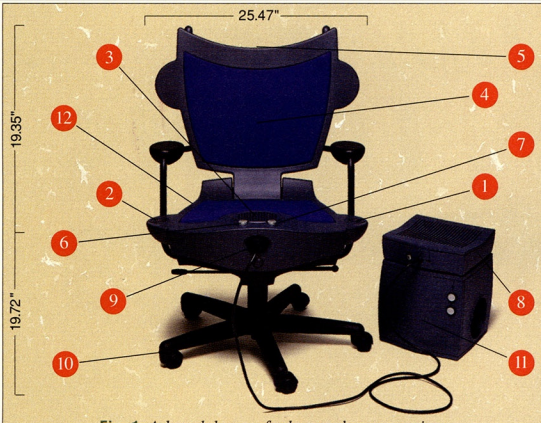


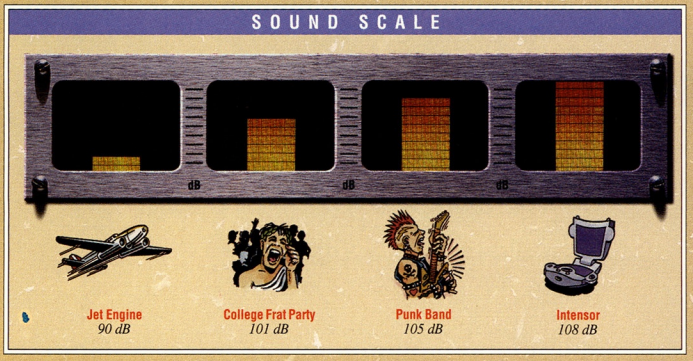
Fig. 1. *A breakdown of what you're up against.*

#	ITEM
1	Left 2" Mid-Range Directional
2	Right 2" Mid-Range Directional
3	5.25" Center Mid-Range
4	5.25" Low Frequency Tactile Driver
5	High-Range Tweeter
6	Sound Volume
7	Tactile Intensity
8	Electronics Unit
9	Heavy-Duty Single Cord Connector
10	Optional Office Chair Base
11	Optional Subwoofer
12	Headphone Jack

PART TWO

Remember, in this chair no one can hear you scream.

Not everyone will have what it takes to handle Intensor's patented audio system. After all, we're talking 5 high-performance built-in speakers with 108dB output. Technically speaking, that means it's really loud. So for the neighbors' sake, you may want to use the headphone jack — which you can do without losing any tactile feedback. But keep in mind — if your ears start bleeding, you should probably turn the thing down.



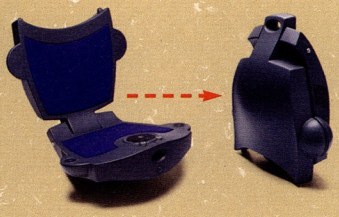


Fig. 2. *At 19 pounds, Intensor is designed for quick evacuation in the event things get ugly. (Shaky hands will appreciate the built-in molded carrying handle.)*

PART THREE

Ducking, dodging, whimpering and other useful gaming skills you might want to perfect.

Be advised. With Intensor, you'll not only hear your games like never before, you'll also feel them. In your back. In your legs. You'll feel sensations in places you never even knew you had. Which means every engine rev, every explosion, every kick will seem more real than you may want it to. So it's important to note that under this type of extreme duress, screaming in high-pitched tones for one's mommy is quite common.

DEFENSIVE PROCEDURES



Fig. 3a. *The Dodge*

Fig. 3b. *The Weave*



Fig. 3c. *The Duck*

TACTILE SENSATION GRAPH

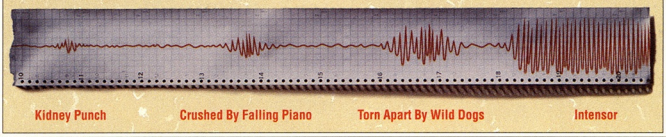




Fig. 4. *Artist's conception of Sensory Gaming's effect on the human heart. Those with heart conditions should proceed at their own risk.*

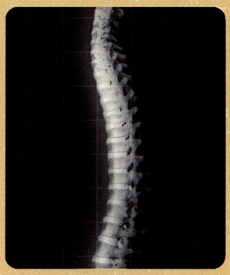


Fig. 5. *Note: Players attempting to negotiate Intensor on anything less than a good, stiff spine may be reduced to a vegetative state.*

PART FOUR

Any game. Any system. Any medium. After this, nothing will ever be the same.

From movies and CDs to all your favorite games, Intensor isn't just compatible with your current system, it actually transforms it. It may also do the same to you. Once you take a seat, there's a new awareness. And there's no going back. It's the gaming version of the thousand-yard stare. You'll recognize it in others who've "been there." Seek them out. Talk to them. This therapeutic approach can help preserve your sanity.



Fig. 6. *Intensor has been known to induce shock. In such cases, place victim flat on back, elevate legs 8 to 12 inches and call for help. (If victim begins vomiting, place him or her on one side to allow fluid drainage.)*



In the event of nervous breakdown, seek help at

www.intensor.com

Assuming you've read this carefully, proceed to your favorite gaming retailer.

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T'ai-Fu

The creator of *Gex* unveils his next character-based game. Can his karate-chopping tiger transcend the typical PlayStation beat-'em-up?



The gameplay is mainly combat, but the levels also feature obstacles



T'ai (above) practices the hover technique learned from the crane clan

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	DreamWorks
Release Date:	Q4 1998
Origin:	U.S.

DreamWorks producer Lyle Hall's trip to China may have been the best argument for getting developers some fresh air once in a while — the trip inspired much of the design of *T'ai-Fu*, DreamWorks' latest 3D action/adventure game. "Instantly," says Hall, "we knew we had a wealth of untapped resources across the board. There was a cast of characters, a place, a world, a conflict, a good guy, and a bad guy."

The story is a rich and detailed one, much to the credit of Steven Spielberg, who, according to the DreamWorks staff, was interested in hearing about something that could be viable for TV or film as well. "Steven really forced out the story," says Hall. "He was interested in hearing the story of the game without hearing how you beat the monkey guard with the two-hit combo or that type of thing."

Subsequently, Hall's elaborate world of *T'ai-Fu* visually captures a look and tone not unlike that of Disney's *Lion King*, but with a plot and style more akin to the classic kung fu films. Once a harmonious land populated with numerous animal clans (cranes, leopards, pandas, etc.) the world is pillaged by a dragon and his horde of snake clan minions. As T'ai, the sole surviving member of the tiger clan, players seek their destiny in this 20-level combat/adventure. "You're going from clan to clan," says Hall of T'ai's quest for answers, "trying to get into their inner fortress, meet their master, prove yourself worthy in some way, shape, or form, whether it be fighting the master, fighting one of his warriors, or accomplishing something for them."

Once the task is complete, T'ai is rewarded with between five and 10 new





A finished *T'ai-Fu* will boast eight or nine boss characters



Artist Rion Vernon's character sketches and paintings for *T'ai-Fu* are some of the highest quality Next Generation has ever seen

moves from that clan. Hall explains that the leopard, monkey, and preying mantis styles are just several new moves T'ai can combine to perform wild combinations. "You can go from a leopard dash into a leopard pounce into a monkey roll," says Hall, "up into the crane hover, down into the 'death from above' combo into a chi shot."

The chi shot is a projectile attack T'ai acquires during the game. The game's animation engine enables the character to smoothly morph from one move to the next, and Hall suggests that by the end of the game, players will be able to link moves for some pretty wild 20-plus hit combos.

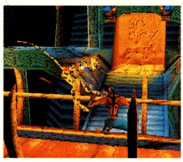
"But you can't do a combo unless you actually hit somebody," says Hall, explaining that an accurate first attack must hit before moves can be linked together, keeping players from moving through levels in one long, memorized chain of moves.

To build T'ai's world, the team started with the *Lost World* single-skinned character engine, which enabled it to design smooth-looking characters that animate well. However, as *Lost World* was restricted to 2D gameplay, the team had to build out a 3D terrain system and 3D collision system. The new tools created for this system have enabled the designers to build in weather effects like heavy wind.



And, of course, the game will feature the now prerequisite software z-buffering for water effects, and dynamic and colored lighting.

Hall and his team of 15 think the timing is just right for *T'ai*. He concedes that the look of the game will draw in the younger crowd first, but he hopes the quality of the gameplay will hook a broad audience. And Hall definitely has the best answer for anyone who may question his martial arts mascot. "This is where Shaolin kung fu comes from," says Hall, noting that Chinese monks developed their namesake styles from observing that species' physical defenses, "not from some monkey doing straight kung fu." NG



T'ai's world is stylishly lit, lush, and not over-saturated with color





One of the design goals was to make each level feel like an entirely different world from the one before it

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Dungeon Keeper II

Can Bullfrog improve on the original without the guidance of Peter Molyneux?





***Dungeon Keeper II*'s new 3D engine finally does justice to the original's graphics and atmosphere**





Players will have a wider range of spells at their disposal to help ward off the Legion of Good

The original *Dungeon Keeper* was Peter Molyneux's final project before leaving Bullfrog to found Lionhead (where he's currently working on *Black and White*). The game's main conceit — reversing the usual game perspective by putting players in charge of a deep, dark dungeon filled with evil critters, where they fend off the assaults of noble heroes — was good for a blackly humorous laugh. The careful balance of battle strategy and resource management also made it eminently playable.

But that didn't make the game perfect — its 3D engine was clearly yesterday's technology, and a host of small bugs kept it from being the instant classic it should have been. The departure of Molyneux seems to have left the design team in a mild quandary over the sequel, but the approach the team has come up with is simple: Fix what was broken without mucking up the original formula.

The most notable upgrade, then, is in the game's 3D engine, which is completely state of the art and supports Direct3D right out of the box. Gone are the indistinct characters and muddy textures of the original — now when a player zooms in to the first-person perspective, the action is clear and snappy.

Other changes are mostly in the bells and whistles department: The interface has been tweaked in small ways, and there are a few additional creatures, a magic system based on Mana points (with new spells), and a few additional room types, like the Casino, which simultaneously keeps the dungeon's creatures entertained and generates money for the player.

In other words, *Dungeon Keeper II* promises to be everything the original was, but more fully realized. NG





It's the same game, it just looks better and plays a lot smoother

Format:	PC
Publisher:	EA/Bullfrog
Developer:	Bullfrog
Release Date:	Q1 1999
Origin:	U.K.



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Buck Bumble

Format:	Nintendo 64
Publisher:	Ubi Soft
Developer:	Argonaut
Release Date:	October 1998
Origin:	U.K.

Next Generation visits Argonaut's London HQ as the *Buck Bumble* team enters the home stretch



Throughout the game, Buck faces giant insect bosses and hordes of wasps

It's been five years since veteran British coder Argonaut has developed for a Nintendo system. In the intervening years it tried in vain to capitalize on the technological head start afforded first by *Starglider* and then the SuperFX chip-powered *StarFox*. Last year's self-consciously kiddy *Croc* propelled the company back into the spotlight, and Argonaut's latest project, *Buck Bumble*, marks a welcome return to the 3D shooter genre for one of Britain's most famous outfits.







The third-person perspective is quite useful in preventing Buck from being attacked from behind

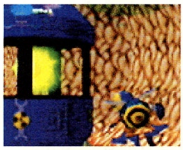
If Croc was overly cute, then Buck, the cyborg-bee, is more of a compromise, walking the fine line between potential children's toy and bona fide game hero. The plot is (as with all games in that genre) largely irrelevant — what is relevant is the smoothness and ease with which Buck can be maneuvered around the environments and the constant attacks from enemy wasps and other insects that keep the pace from dropping.

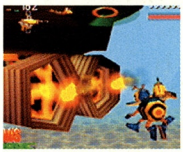
Producer Nick Clarke describes *Buck Bumble* as an attempt to re-create the once eponymous 2D shooter in a 3D environment. Accordingly, players are "steered" in the right direction with carefully placed power-ups as they logically progress through the 20 garden-themed levels.

In charge of the project is Carl Graham. Having worked on the original 3D engine for *StarFox* with Shigeru Miyamoto, he's strictly old school, and like Nintendo's star designer, believes in the "fair play" principal — no inexplicable or unavoidable deaths for Buck. The third-person perspective allows the player to avoid attacks from the rear as well as maneuver to pick up power-ups in the form of extra weapons and life from honey droplets.

The two-player, split-screen mode allows for deathmatch play but was in need of some tweaking when **Next Generation** tried it out, with overly simplistic maps and a little too much dead time thanks to the close fogging. However, with recent access to Nintendo's own N64 microcode, optimization may provide the solution.

Buck Bumble is unlikely to become a classic, but it should fill a gap in the spartan N64 library. Of perhaps more interest is Argonaut's admission that it's already well into its first Dreamcast project. Until then, *Buck* may satiate those who feel it's about time the creators of *StarFox* came home to Nintendo. NG





There are a variety of simple environment-based puzzles for Buck to solve

Heretic II

Raven sucks the last of the marrow out of the *Quake 2* engine, but don't start snoring yet — the game ain't no first-person shooter



Waterfalls, fountains, statues, and sweeping architecture lend to the depth of the *Heretic* universe

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	Raven
Release Date:	November 1998
Origin:	U.S.

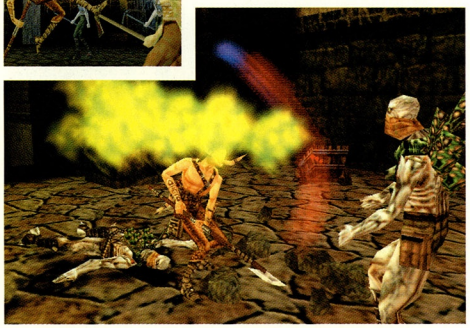


Anyone familiar with the *Hexen* and *Heretic* series knows they were born of Id's *Doom* and *Quake* engines, so one might expect *Heretic II* to follow suit and look an awful lot like *Quake 2*. Then why does it look more like *Tomb Raider* than another dungeon crawler?

"The first-person shooter market," says Activision Producer Steve Stringer, "is just so crowded these days that you want something that sets you apart."

Yet the third-person market is also beginning to burgeon under its own weight, and Stringer admits that he was hesitant about that at first too. "We were kind of all skeptical around here until the first time I saw it, sat down and played it — it was just like totally something different and totally something special."

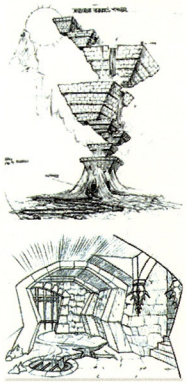




Corvus uses his staff for a cool pole vault and can flip side-to-side as well. No motion capture data was used to create any movement

Stringer is right. While many third-person games are uninspired, *Heretic II* certainly isn't one of them. Nor is *Heretic II* a *Tomb Raider* rip-off with elves. The player again assumes the role of Corvus, and the early levels of this 22-level game already serve up heavy doses of action. But Stringer explains the style of action is inherently different. "A lot of what makes the first-person shooter fun is the precise nature of it. You know, the payoff is just nailing a guy as he's leaping through the air. When you go to third-person, you lose that preciseness, simply by virtue of the fact that you don't have that aiming reticule right in front of you."

Stringer explains that a visually strong character and weapons are absolutely necessary with the loss of that



Initial conceptual design work gives little hint of *Heretic II*'s radical departure from its predecessor





There's no Lego-block design going on around here. The *Heretic II* team wants nothing but very organic environments and simple puzzles

pinpoint control because "you're surrounded by enemies and you're pulling off moves. Corvus is doing flips and pole vaults, you've got your fire spells going, and you're using your Rings of Repulsion spell."

The majority of the combat in the game is spell-based, aside from a bow and a staff. The staff is the only melee-based weapon, something Raven decided to cut back on after getting feedback on *Hexen 2*. "Melee weapons throw off the balance," says Stringer. "We understand they need to be used as your last resort and not as one of your primary weapons."

"We were all kind of skeptical around here until the first time I saw it, sat down and played it"

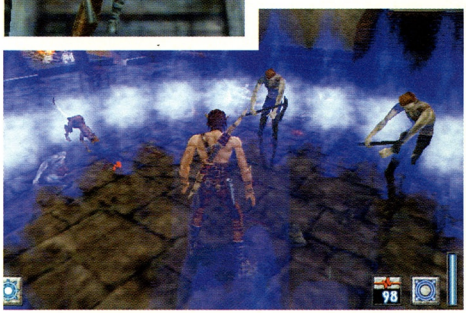
Steve Stringer, producer, Activision

But the game isn't just about weapon collecting. Players must also find the cause of and cure for a plague that has cursed Corvus' hometown. This is especially important because players themselves become infected, although from a graphical standpoint, that's a positive thing. "[It's] cool because you'll see some changes in Corvus' skins as the plague progresses," says Stringer.

Throughout the player's journey, levels will vary from canyon areas to swamp areas to a strange lair of amphibious creatures. "You're not just in a castle or something like that," says Stringer. "You're actually traversing the continent. The art team and the level design team have been working to convey that sense of expansiveness and realism to the world."

And it is realistic, in that the *Quake 2* engine provides a world with thick walls that feel far more solid than the paper-thin environments of *Tomb Raider*. And even a month before alpha, the character, the camera, and the environment are already working so well together it's difficult to conceive the project is this early. Raven might just have taught an old engine some new tricks. NG





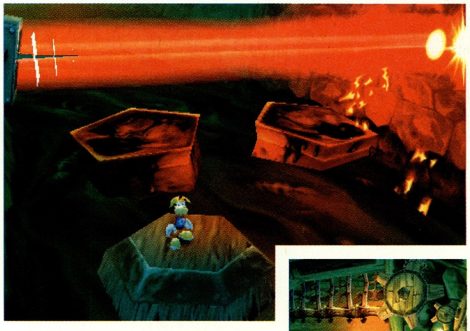
The minimum platform is a 166 with 32 megs; these screens were taken from a Voodoo^2 version running at 800x600, locked in at 60fps

Rayman 2: The Great Escape

Despite his lack of arms and legs, Rayman takes the big step into 3D

Format:	PC/N64/PSX/Dreamcast
Publisher:	Ubi Soft
Developer:	Ubi Soft
Release:	Nov. '98 (PC/N64); Q1 '99 (PSX); Q4 '99 (DC)
Origin:	France









The creators at Ubi Soft say that the cartoon aspects of the game are partially inspired by Tex Avery

When it comes to the topic of Rayman, the creators of this limbless little hero are like proud parents boasting about their first child — with a combination of infectious enthusiasm and overwhelming pride. This is especially true of Michel Ancel, who created the character in 1995 and describes his hero as having the sense of humor of Indiana Jones and the sense of purpose of Robin Hood.

But as all parents must do, Ancel and the rest of the team must help their baby grow up. So what they plan to do is hold onto all the aspects that made the original *Rayman* sell almost two million units while evolving their hero to the next level: 3D. "In *Rayman 2*, Rayman is more mature and far less childish," says Nathalie Paccard, project manager of the PC and PlayStation versions. "His different skills and powers have all been improved. And yet all the humor and fast pacing of the original *Rayman* is still there. In fact, they're even better."

The improved skills and powers Paccard speaks of include actions like riding rodeo-style on a missile with legs, water-skiing behind a sea serpent, and using Rayman's hair to fly like a chopper. But perhaps more important is his ability to interact with any object or character — a definite throwback to the original game. For instance, Rayman can pick up a random plum and use it as a platform or even throw it on a wall of branches to make a bridge.

But in order for Rayman the character to mature, Rayman's universe must develop as well. And here, the team has incorporated a storyline (albeit typical save-your-friends-conquer-the-enemy fare)





From left to right, the main members of the *Rayman* team: Nathalie Paccard, Frédéric Houde, Michel Ancel, Grégoire Gobbi, and Serge Hascoet



There are 80 people working on *Rayman 2* — a sign of the team's commitment to making quality games for all systems — PC (shown here), Nintendo 64, PlayStation, and although unconfirmed, Dreamcast





The team bringing *Rayman 2* into 3D is the same group that worked on the original *Rayman*, as well as *Tonic Trouble* — appropos, considering the game is using an optimized version of the *Tonic Trouble* engine

and used the power of 3D to "give players very high-speed sensations that they couldn't achieve in 2D games." Says Grégoire Gobbi, senior project manager, "Players get the feeling of living real action scenes and experiencing things that they wouldn't expect anywhere else besides great action movies." Of course, none of this would work if the graphics weren't beautiful — but this is also why the hardware requirements are particularly taxing. Three-D acceleration (either DirectX5, DirectX6, or Glide) is required to make the game run at either 1280x1024 or 1600x1200 resolution at between 30 and 60 frames per second.

So just how immersive is the game? How about 10 worlds, 20 levels, and a number of friends-turned-nefarious-pirate-robot enemies? "There is always something going on in *Rayman 2*'s world: sensation, emotion," says Game Design Manager Serge Hascoet. "The player must be encouraged to move on and to react in each and every moment of the game. At the end of each map, the player should be out of breath but satisfied."

Which brings up another question: the difficulty level. The original *Rayman* was notorious for trying the patience of even the most well-tempered gamer. But the development team has set its sights on making the game playable by a wide range of people — hardcore gamers and dabblers alike. "No player should be stuck in one level for more than a half hour," says Gobbi. "To avoid this, we use a lot of checkpoints, which softens the player's life — no one will be forced to start a level over 20 times."

On top of everything else, Ubi Soft has displayed a dedication to making all of the versions of the game — PC, N64, PlayStation, and (although Ubi won't confirm it) Dreamcast — different so that they play to each system's strengths. So, for instance, the PC version will include more maps and secret levels while the Nintendo 64 game will have great graphics that push the lighting effect capabilities to the limit. Meanwhile, the PlayStation version will feature smaller worlds, but there will be a greater number of them.

These days, it's not hard to find developers who sound excited about their games, but somehow Ubi Soft's enthusiasm seems genuine. Perhaps it's in the devotion they show to making the product perfect, or perhaps it's in the way they talk about their hero with such earnest affection. Whatever the reasons, one thing is clear: Rayman has grown up — and that's reason enough for Ubi Soft to feel proud. NG









Since 3D action games are known for difficulties in camera movement, the team has developed very flexible directional tools for the camera







If the game has somewhat of a movielike feel, it's most likely because the developers consulted with cinematographers on how to handle camera movements

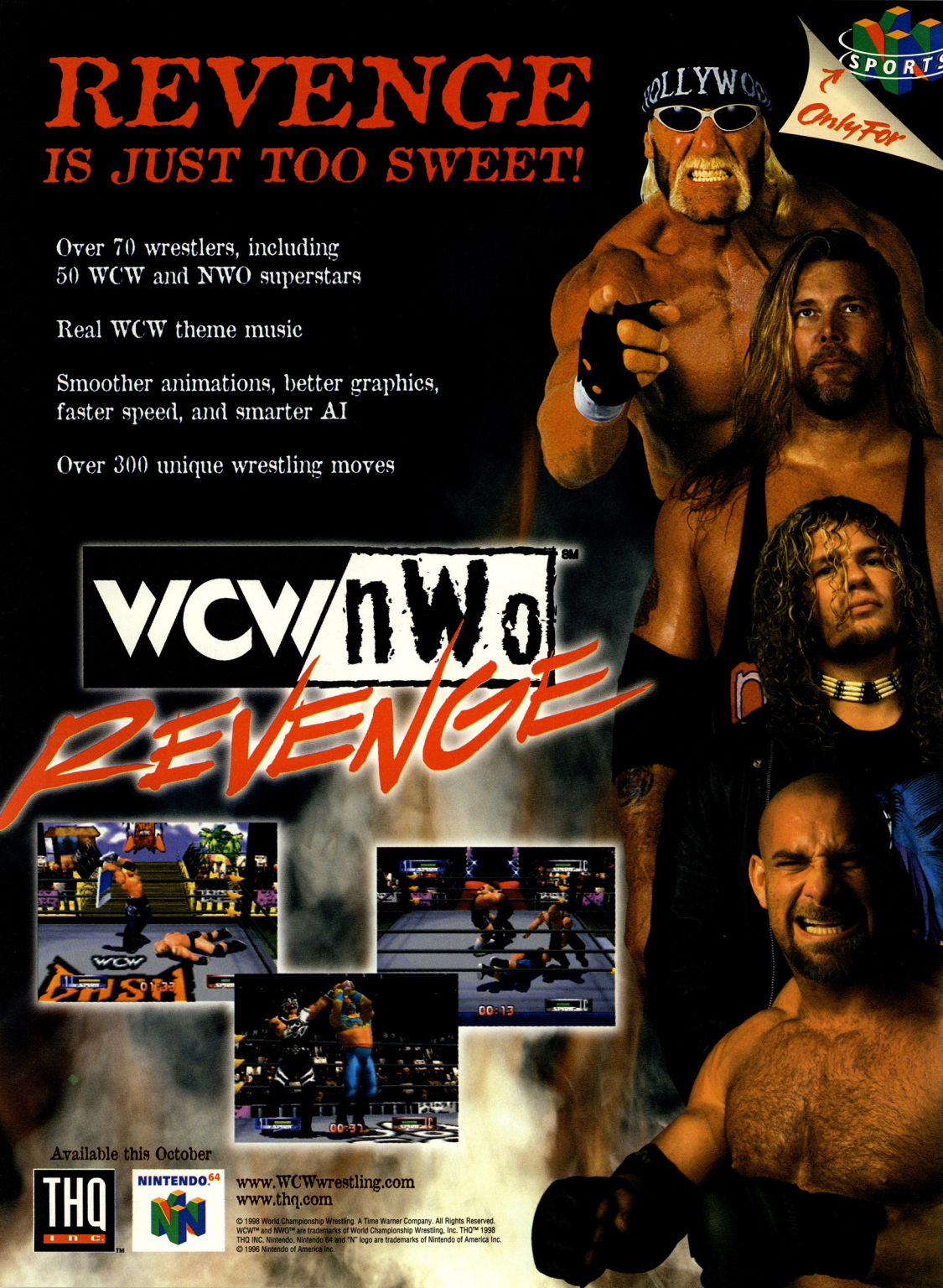
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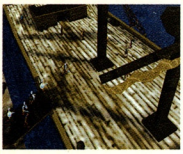


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Myth II: Soulblighter

The game that showed how realtime strategy and 3D could mix is coming back better than ever





The level designers and artists have been busy since *Myth*, and it shows

The original *Myth* redefined realtime strategy, shucking off the resource management model of the *Command & Conquer* clones and concentrating on realistic medieval battle tactics within a fully 3D environment. As groundbreaking and interesting as *Myth* was, though, it had a few problems, including a complicated control scheme and a steep learning curve.

Developer/publisher Bungie has taken these (and other) criticisms to heart, however, in preparing the sequel. The most immediately noticeable upgrade is to the game's interface, with the addition of a menu bar to the bottom of the screen (which can be turned off for the more "professional" players), enabling quick selection of troop formations and some common troop orders — "retreat" and "scatter," for example.

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Bungie
Developer:	Bungie
Release Date:	November 1998
Origin:	U.S.



Improvements to the interface have made controlling the troops easier

While many of the battlefields of the original were large, they were also mostly barren wastelands. *Myth II* features a much greater variety of terrain, including a castle to storm, as well as a few indoor missions. The design team has also added more animated objects to the map, including some "ambient" creatures like birds, deer, and possibly wolves, to bring the environment more to life. In the case of the wolves, this also adds a new environmental hazard. Furthermore, each character has been re-rendered with twice the number of frames of animation and now comes with multiple attack sequences, which subtly bring the battlefield alive with a more realistically random hubbub of motion.

Best of all, Bungie is committing itself to releasing, in some form, the *Myth* level editors (at press time it's unclear whether these will be ready in time to be included with the game itself). The Terrain Editor enables consumers to alter existing landscapes or create their own, while the so-called "Tag Editor" controls the scripting and behavior of every in-game character, from wizards to peasants to, well, chickens.

We're looking forward to it. NG



New pathfinding AI means soldiers now have the ability to walk through friendly lines, instead of having to walk around them





***Myth II* includes a number of indoor as well as outdoor missions**

NASCAR 3

Building on the impressive engine created for *Grand Prix Legends*, Papyrus brings the future of auto racing back to the present







Players will be able to even further detail their paint jobs with 16-bit textures

***NASCAR 3* will enable players to adjust their car in many ways that aren't possible in *NASCAR 2*; for instance, players can add a track bar for rear weight bias, and shocks and springs separately. Also, tape can be applied to the grill in order to increase downforce**

Grand Prix Legends was nearing the final phase of development when **Next Generation** visited the fanatic racing developers locked away at Boston-based Papyrus. At that time, some team members had already moved on to work on the third installment of the company's flagship product line — *NASCAR*.

The pre-alpha build of *NASCAR Racing 3* featured several test cars and a test track, and the consensus in the Papyrus office was that it already felt unbelievable. **Next Generation** got behind the wheel and had to agree, as the fantastic physics engine created for *Grand Prix Legends* has already been improved upon for the leap to *NASCAR 3*.

For one thing, *NASCAR 3*'s physics model is more accurate, as it will take into account airflow dynamics and downforce on the modern cars. Plus, the suspension, shock absorbers, and tires will move more realistically, based on new computation methods. The chassis itself will also pitch and roll more accurately.

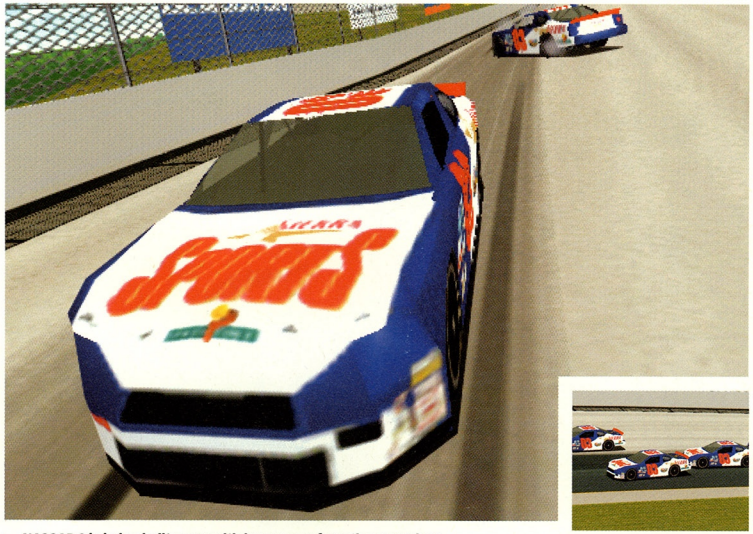
"So if you whack into a wall," says Randy Cassidy, senior software engineer, "a real car would tend to nose down and go end over end. The same thing will



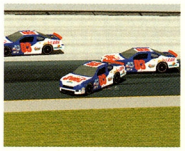


The developers are trying to smarten up the AI so that the cars simulate the strategies of a real NASCAR race

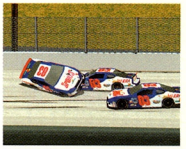
Format:	PC
Publisher:	Sierra Sports
Developer:	Papyrus
Release Date:	Q1 1999
Origin:	U.S.



***NASCAR 3* is being built as a multiplayer game from the ground up**











The game uses an enhanced version of *Grand Prix Legends'* physics engine

happen here. You'll certainly be able to get airborne in these cars, but it's not the way to win a race."

As for tracks, the team is fairly confident it will have 19 in the box when the game ships, barring any licensing problems. (Daytona will be missing once again, as Sega holds the exclusive license to that course.) Also, a Grand National expansion pack may be available when *NASCAR 3* releases, adding what should be another 12 to 14 tracks based on the Busch series.

In addition to physics model enhancements, the AI is undergoing a serious overhaul. Designer Dave Mattson has been studying races religiously to get the most realistic racing strategies simulated in the game. Ultimately, he is trying to figure out every reason and situation for a pit stop, and then model it. "There is an awareness," says Mattson, "of the strategy goals beyond the race. Cars will stay out for an extra lap to try and lead a lap, where they get five bonus points for that. Which they do all the time in real life."

Mattson also hopes to augment the NASCAR experience by expanding the live race weekend features. For instance, there are now two qualifying sessions, as well as two practice sessions and a happy hour final practice.

Visual enhancements for the series include 16-bit textures and new light sourcing techniques, for instance, specular highlights on cars. Particle systems are also in place to provide fantastic sparking and smoke effects, as well as dirt clumps, which will stick to vehicles that stray from the track.

The *NASCAR 3* team is also planning an advanced damage model for the cars. Papyrus isn't being specific as to how, but it may be a similar method to the one GT is using for *Trans-Am Racing*, whereby damage is shown by warping textures at vertices on the car models.

Considering *Grand Prix Legends* is over a year late, it's likely **Next Generation** will visit Papyrus again before *NASCAR 3* ships. However, considering how remarkable *Grand Prix Legends* is looking, it's not unwarranted to be curious about the company's next project, even at this early stage. NG

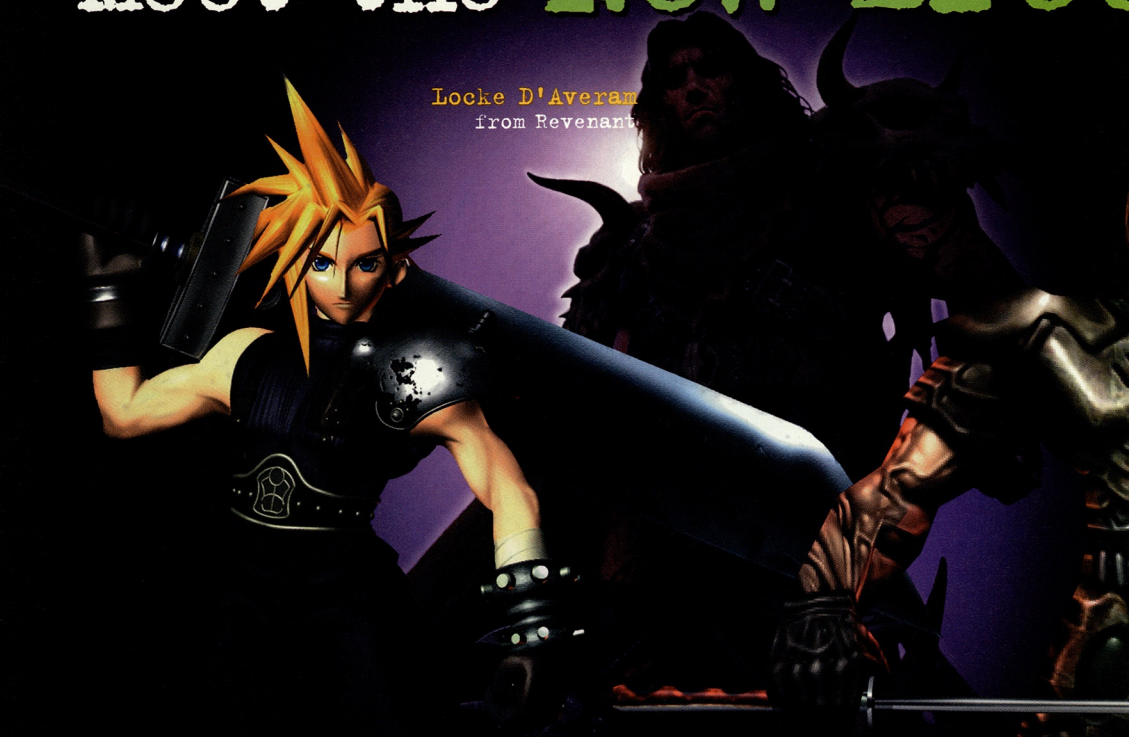
"You'll certainly be able to get airborne in these cars, but it's not the way to win a race"

Randy Cassidy, senior software engineer, Papyrus



The team at Papyrus hopes to have 19 tracks for players to race on

Meet the New Bree



Cloud from Final Fantasy VII

Hiro Miyam

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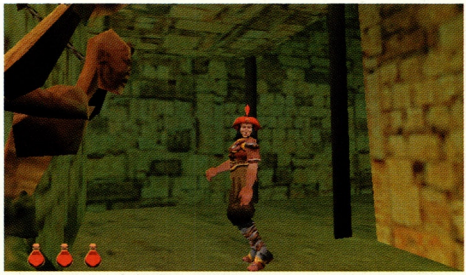


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Milestones

The latest screenshots of tomorrow's hits in the making

Long live the Prince! *Prince of Persia* is one of many games this month that take 3D gaming to the next level. Almost equally impressive is the number of sports titles that raise the bar in both gameplay and 3D design. While EA smiles smuggly from its throne, developers Radical Entertainment and Psygnosis plot to overthrow the dictator's grasp on consumer dollars.



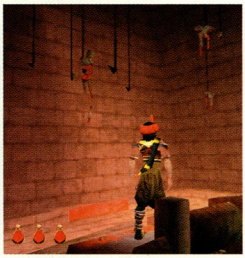
PRINCE OF PERSIA PC









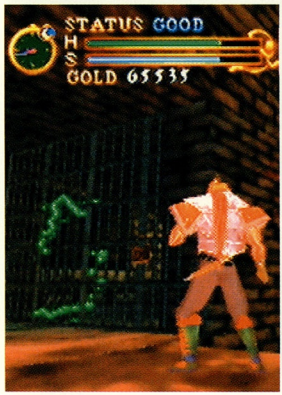




The 3D debut of *Prince of Persia* captures the look and feel of the classic series. With so many technology partners using *Prince* as the testbed for the ultimate suite of development tools, the final product has the potential to make or break the reputation of numerous companies

CASTLEVANIA 64 N64









Konami is willing to take as long as it needs to create the perfect *Castlevania* on Nintendo 64. Any other developer would have discarded the whip and other 2D traits of the original series, just to make life easier in 3D. That is not the case with Konami. The latest delay sets the release date back into the first quarter of 1999

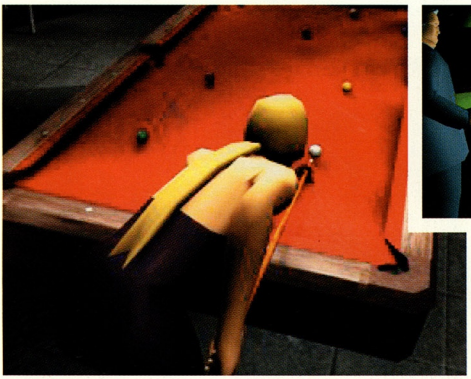
KLINGON





Klingon Honor Guard is the first "Star Trek" 3D shooter to come to PC. No need to understand Klingon, the incredible visuals speak for themselves

EXPERT POOL PC









Psygnosis is attempting to create the ultimate pool game, from the true ball physics to the faithfully re-created environments. Even locations with multiple tables support side games — that is, computer opponents that play actual realtime games in the background

TONIC TROUBLE



Ubi Soft's first N64 effort is finally near completion after numerous delays during development

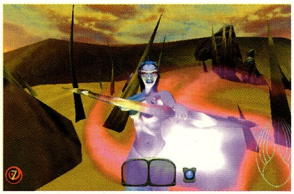
NATIONAL HOCKEY NIGHT



ESPN enters the arena, giving PC and PlayStation owners an alternative to the EA brand

GIANTS PC









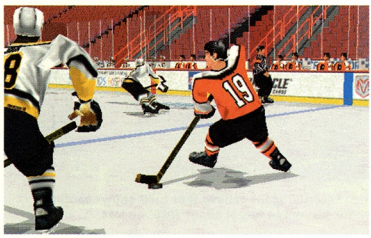


Planet Moon's signature visuals permeate the landscape in its latest creation, which is a far cry from its last game, *MDK*

NHL '99 PC/PlayStation







There is so much momentum behind EA's hockey brand that it appears as if it can do no wrong. However, as each year goes by, the competition grows stronger. Despite a few visual upgrades and technology advances, the brand is inevitably slowing down — but barely

PRO 18: WORLD TOUR GOLF





Psygnosis plans to have both PC and PlayStation versions of its golf sim out by the holidays, with true replicated courses

AKUJI THE HEARTLESS PlayStation









Imagine a game that plays like *Gex* and looks like *Wargods*. Well, that's what you get with *Akuji the Heartless*, and just in time for the holidays ... (insert sound of crickets)

VIPER



Sierra's PC racer offers true physics, impressive crashes, and realtime deformation of cars

MONKEY HERO



Blam's RPG, inspired by the Chinese monkey legend, will be ready to release by the holidays

STARCON PC/PlayStation







Not to be outdone by Sierra's *Homeworld*, the classic *Star Control* series shows off its mastery of realtime space battles in splendid 3D

PROBOARDERS PC/PlayStation







ESPN and Radical Entertainment believe that their snowboarding game is enough for players to forget about *1080°* on N64


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A Question of Character



Mario, Sonic, Lara Croft, Crash Bandicoot — just four of the game industry's homegrown superstars. But what makes a great game character? And what was the thinking behind the design of our favorite game heroes? A **Next Generation** report



In 1980, *Pac-Man* changed everything. Up until that point, there were no game characters – players simply piloted crude spaceships, drove blocky cars, or batted a ball back and forth. This was largely because the graphics technology of the time prohibited anything more complex than basic shapes made out of a handful of square pixels.

But as graphics technology continued to improve and game designers became more inventive, companies stumbled upon the idea of offering gamers characters with personality. Namco was the first company to do this, although it helped that *Pac-Man* was a great game. But what turned a gaming fad into a cultural phenomenon was the fact that for the first time, a videogame had character.

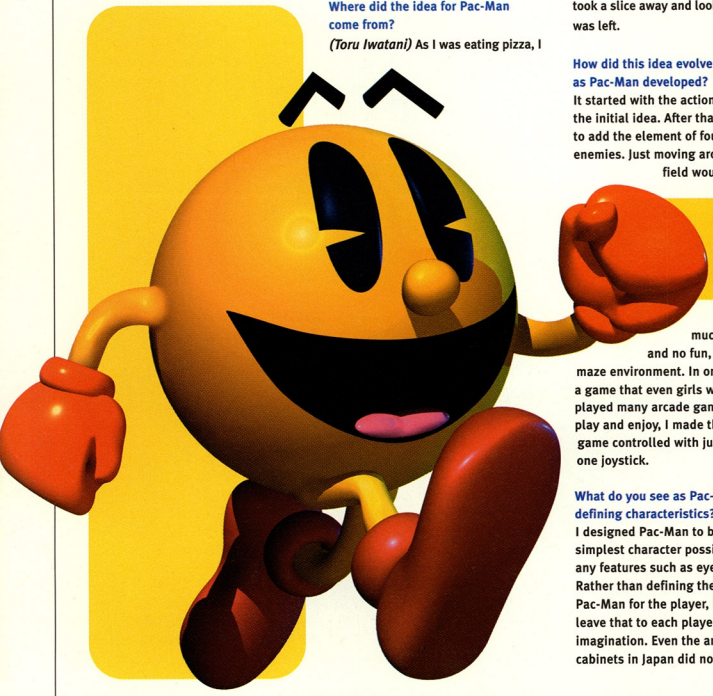
"*Pac-Man* gave videogames a face. And a face, however featureless and crudely rendered, gave videogames entree into the celebrity-obsessed mass media," notes JC Hertz in *Joystick Nation*. "*Asteroids* and *Pong* could make money. But Pac-Man could become a star, with the requisite merchandising bonanza of pillow cases, backpacks, lunch boxes, Hallmark cards, and gift wrap." Pac-Man went on to star in his own Saturday morning television show and even a Christmas special. The track "Pac-Man Fever" climbed to number two on the Billboard Charts in 1982. As one Midway executive bragged in *Time* magazine, "I think we have the Mickey Mouse of the '80s."

Of course, it wasn't long before other companies realized the potential of creating their own videogame superstars. By building a hero from scratch, publishers retained full ownership of the character. This meant that they not only paid no licensing fees or royalty percentages to a third party, but also maintained complete control over how and where the character was used. Unlike a third-party character, Pac-Man could not be seduced into defecting to Namco's competition. Unlike a movie star, Pac-Man would never be caught in a sex or drugs scandal and lose his market value. Unlike any other kind of "talent,"

Pac-Man

CREATOR: Toru Iwatani, Namco
BORN: 1980
LEADING ROLES: *Pac-Man*, *Ms. Pac-Man*, *Baby Pac-Man*, *Pac-Man Jr.*, *Professor Pac-Man*, *Pac-Man Plus*, *Super Pac-Man*, *Mr. and Mrs. Pac-Man*, *Pac-Attack*, *Pac-Land*, *Pac-Mania*

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? The original and, many say, still the best character. *Pac-Man* was the first coin-op featuring a personality (even if he was just a yellow blob), and he's the reason we danced to "Pac-Man Fever" and not the "Space Invaders Stomp." Still one of the most recognizable game characters in existence



THE MOUTH: Either open or closed, the original Pac-Man's only moving part. Later, more details were added. But back in the day, Pac-Man was defined by what he did, not by what he looked like.

Where did the idea for Pac-Man come from?
(Toru Iwatani) As I was eating pizza, I took a slice away and looked at what was left.

How did this idea evolve and change as Pac-Man developed?
It started with the action of eating as the initial idea. After that, I decided to add the element of four ghosts as enemies. Just moving around an open field would be too much freedom and no fun, so I set up a maze environment. In order to make a game that even girls who hadn't played many arcade games could play and enjoy, I made the entire game controlled with just one joystick.

What do you see as Pac-Man's defining characteristics?
I designed Pac-Man to be the simplest character possible, without any features such as eyes or limbs. Rather than defining the image of Pac-Man for the player, I wanted to leave that to each player's imagination. Even the arcade cabinets in Japan did not feature any other representation of Pac-Man besides the pie-slice look. The more anthropomorphic look was designed and added later in the U.S.

What feelings is Pac-Man designed to evoke from the player?
I feel that it's important not to just think of Pac-Man as the only main character in the game — the ghosts play an equally important role. All of the ghosts have different AI algorithms that reflect their comical personalities. It's sort of like asking whether Tom or Jerry is the star of the "Tom and Jerry" cartoons.

To what extent is Pac-Man's form dictated by his function?
His form simply represents the personification of "eating."

What's the secret of Pac-Man's success?
Pac and the ghosts represent a cute (or playful) image to players instead of something scary or frightening. Then, by eating a power pellet, Pac transforms himself from being pursued to being the pursuer. This change in the flow of action makes the game much more dynamic.

With *Pac-Man*, the introduction of cut scenes [the animation sequences that appear after a few rounds are cleared] gives players a chance to catch their breath and also keeps the pace of the game from becoming monotonous. These intermissions also give players an additional motivation for wanting to play further. Lastly, because of the ease of single-joystick control, the game has an appeal to every type of person.

Pac-Man worked for free. And, perhaps most importantly, gamers loved him.

In 1981 Nintendo hit pay dirt when Shigeru Miyamoto — forced back to the drawing board after Nintendo lost the license to publish a game based on Popeye — doodled on a sketch pad and came up with Mario. The rest is videogame history. As with Pac-Man, sound gameplay was the bedrock upon which the cult of Mario's personality could be built. But once again, it was clear that gamers relished the chance to take on the role of a cute, likable character.

Nintendo quickly started earning a seven-figure income each year from licensing the use of Mario on everything from fishing rods and T-shirts to temporary tattoos and lunch boxes. In 1989 *Super Mario Bros. 3* sold more than 11 million cartridges worldwide and grossed more than $500 million in the U.S. alone. In 1990 the American Q Ratings (a survey of the popularity of politicians, movie stars, and other celebrities) showed that Mario was recognized by more American children than Mickey Mouse.

Throughout the late 1980s and well into the 1990s, Mario and Nintendo blazed a trail that every other videogame company tried to follow. On the PC side, Leisure Suit Larry jostled for position with a slew of ax-wielding fantasy RPG heroes. On the consoles, a plethora of perky mascots and goofy game heroes attempted to grab a slice of the limelight. In the arcades, titles like *Golden Axe*, *Double Dragon*, and *Shinobi* introduced new heroes. But it wasn't until 1991 that any company came close to matching the appeal of Shigeru Miyamoto's Italian plumber. That company, of course, was Sega, with the one and only Sonic the Hedgehog.

Sonic was born almost of necessity. As Sega's

Cloud

CREATOR: Kenji Mimurao, SquareSoft
BORN: 1995
LEADING ROLES: *Final Fantasy VII*
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? $4 million in sales

Where did the idea for Cloud come from?
(Kenji Mimurao) **As for Cloud's mental characteristics, I wanted to create a different main character, one that had never existed in games before. He is an ordinary young man who wants to be strong, but is still vulnerable and definitely not the hero type. As for Cloud's appearance, it was illustrated without anything in mind, so I can't say it came from anywhere in particular.**

How did this idea evolve and change as Cloud developed?
As I worked on the inner aspects of Cloud, the fragile elements of humans became more and more emphasized. The complex in Cloud's mind became far more realistic than originally intended, an example shown in the event where Cloud suddenly starts to apologize. Initially, he was not planned to be that weak.

What do you see as Cloud's defining characteristics?
His complex, his sword, and his chocobo hairstyle.

What feelings is Cloud designed to evoke from the player?
Inner pain.

How are Cloud's character and the *Final Fantasy* game world connected?
Everything is completely centered on Cloud, since the story is about Cloud growing up.

What's the secret of Cloud's success?
I believe it is because he has many things everyone can sympathize with. Cloud experiences the path everybody takes, which is admiration, failure, parting, and growing up. I think the users probably see themselves in Cloud.

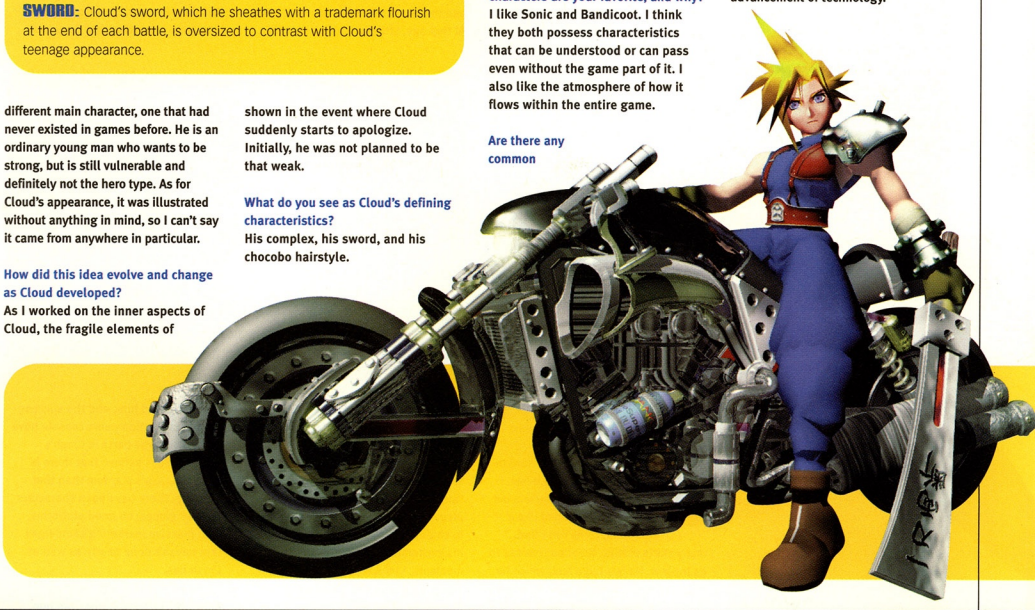
Besides Cloud, which outside characters are your favorite, and why?
I like Sonic and Bandicoot. I think they both possess characteristics that can be understood or can pass even without the game part of it. I also like the atmosphere of how it flows within the entire game.

Are there any common features to the popular characters in major blockbuster games?
I think it's as simple as being cute, cool, and attractive. In a game with a well-written story, it's also very important to be able to sympathize with a character, to relate to its emotions.

How do present technical limitations restrict the growth or development of game characters?
There are restrictions in many ways; however, I believe that these limitations will be able to be overcome sometime in the future — it's a secret. By the time one development process becomes available or possible, we hope for the next, and the next, and so forth. That is what I've experienced and what I believe leads to the advancement of technology.

HAIR: Cloud's hair resembles another Square creation — the chocobo — and the bright color makes him easy to spot against the rendered *FFVII* backgrounds. The large spikes are also easy to render with limited polygons.

SWORD: Cloud's sword, which he sheathes with a trademark flourish at the end of each battle, is oversized to contrast with Cloud's teenage appearance.



16-bit Genesis console attempted to make the most of its head start over Nintendo's Super NES, Sega was aware that it needed its own proprietary character to act as both game hero and corporate mascot. With Mario's 16-bit debut looming, Sega needed to offer gamers a compelling alternative — and fast. Within all divisions of Sega, word spread that there would be a competition to come up with a game character to rival Mario. Artist Masato Oshima came up with the winning idea — allegedly later confiding to a Sega colleague that he had started off by simply "crossing Felix the Cat with Mickey Mouse" — and Sonic was born.

With a firm gameplay foundation courtesy of Yuji Naka's superlative programming skills, Sonic never looked back. He spearheaded Sega's assault on Nintendo's videogame empire, and for a while, the 16-bit console wars of the early 1990s became personal, as Sonic and Mario duked it out for supremacy. For what it's worth, Nintendo clearly had the last laugh — Sonic, like Sega, stumbled badly in the post 16-bit world (although *Sonic Adventures* may change that), but Sega can always point to the 1993 Q Ratings, which indicated that Mario was still ahead of Mickey Mouse, but Sonic was ahead of them both.

After Sonic, the floodgates opened. A slew of copycat "mascots with attitude" flooded the console marketplace. From Aero the Acrobat to Zool the Ninja Ant, from Bubsy the Bobcat to Zero the Kamikaze Squirrel, it seemed as if every software company tried to create its own superstar. As graphics technology continued to advance, more and more genres found that including strong, defined characters was not only possible but also a route to greater success. Fighting games never looked back after Capcom scored big with the personality-led *Street Fighter* series. Nintendo

(continued on page 84)

Crash Bandicoot

CREATOR: Jason Rubin (with help from Naughty Dog and Universal Interactive Studios)

BORN: January 1996

LEADING ROLES: *Crash Bandicoot 1*, *2*, and *3*

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? Crash's achievements in the U.S. are impressive enough. What elevates him to superstardom is his success in Japan, where he's the most popular Western-developed game hero of all time

Where did the idea for Crash come from?

(Jason Rubin) Somewhere early in the process of making the first *Crash* game, I came up with the idea that we should "hijack" a vaguely familiar animal name and put our character's face on it. So, for example, when we think of a roadrunner, we think of the Warner Bros. character, not the scrawny, brownish reality. Likewise, the real Tasmanian devil looks nothing like the "Taz" we know from cartoons. The images of the roadrunner and Tasmanian devil are forever linked to the characters. So much so that offhand, most people don't realize that the real creature has nearly no visual correlation. If we have succeeded over the last three years, then all over the planet bandicoots are described as meter-high, orange, spike-haired, tennis shoe- and blue pants-wearing, spinning, huge-smiled, and good-natured.



How did this idea evolve and change as Crash developed?

The character that ended up being Crash Bandicoot went through four months of intensive design. At one point he looked like a bulldog, at another he walked on all fours. He was blue, he was green, and at one point he had a large squirrel's tail. Crash's personality, on the other hand, has always been the same: quirky, clumsy, fun-loving, and excitable, with a touch of mischief shown through a big, toothy grin.

What do you see as Crash's defining characteristics?

Crash is orange. It is hard to miss that. There are few other orange characters out there. He is shaped like a light bulb, so he can't find many shirts that fit. He often chooses to go topless. He has huge feet, which he covers with tennis shoes, and he wears blue shorts that pass his knees. His face is typical bandicoot, if there is such a thing, with a long nose and pointy ears. The hair on the top of his head he wears in a red spike, which annoys his parents to no end. Also, he wears fingerless dark gloves on his large hands, perhaps for use on his Harley. Large, expressive eyes with dark brows and a humongous, dentist-sponsored smile round out his features. But Crash Bandicoot is personality first. When asked about Crash, many children who played the first games will mention the eyebrows he waved at the beginning of the hog round or his facial emotions, which was a first for a character in a 3D game. Crash is the type of character you want to spend time with.

What feelings is Crash designed to evoke from the player?

We always wanted Crash to be compatible with all ages. As a 26-year-old [at that time], I didn't want a character that I might describe as "too cute to like if the game wasn't good." At the same time, we wanted a character that would be attractive to an eight-year-old. Crash is both "cute" in a cartoon character kind of way, as well as "real" in a more adult way. Young kids will pick up on the slapstick expressions that he makes, the expressive ways in which he "dies," and the beating he takes along the way. At that age, attitude matters less than action. Children like to smack Crash around. He is, if you ask them, "funny." But at the same time, Crash shows more adult attitudes as well. He is not so rounded and soft that we find him "sickly cute." He acknowledges the player's existence, turning to the screen to chide the player for failing or to wink his excitement, and it is these moments, I believe, when the older player gets attached. To us, he is struggling as we do.

How are Crash's appearance and the game world connected?

We spent a good deal of time experimenting with the PlayStation game console and the new 3D world in which Crash would be placed before designing the character. The spin attack was mandated by the difficulty of judging in 3D space where exactly the enemy was. A punch, for example, would not work as well. The belly flop is also an imprecise attack that works well.

Crash has short legs, so the screen isn't filled with rapidly strobing leg motion, and he has a huge head, so you can see the facial animation that we gave him. If we were going to be the only 3D title to have polygonal facial animation, we wanted to be sure the player caught it. Likewise, his hands are big so that you can see where they are. And in case you might lose the orange hands and orange arms as they cross his orange body, we gave Crash dark gloves so that the player's eyes could track his arm/hand motion. His color, as well, is mandated by the game. Crash is orange, and nothing in the background is allowed to be that color. It is always easy to track him.

What's the secret of Crash's success?

Certainly, the quality of his titles, the incredible marketing that Sony has placed behind him, and the success of the PlayStation game console have all played large parts in Crash's success. But I believe that there is more to Crash's stardom than that. Certainly there have been characters in good games, on good platforms, with massive marketing campaigns that haven't done nearly as well as Crash has.

I believe that it is Crash's personality that has propelled him. Why else would over 1,500 *Crash* owners send envelope art to a large American gaming magazine? Why would thousands of Japanese children write in, begging to receive one of only 1,000 Crash dance instructional videos? After buying the game, the marketing is over. Why does the Naughty Dog web page get request after request, from all over the world, for toys and other Crash stuff? Crash is bigger than just a game character. I believe people want more from him.

EYES: No physical feature is more important in showing emotion than the eyes. Crash's eyes are large and bright and framed by two large, dark eyebrows. The eyebrows shape the eyes, which shine from beneath like two headlights. Often, Crash will keep his eyes slightly askew, giving him a more unhinged appearance. At other times, he will open them wide in fear or angle them down in the middle, showing anger.

SMILE/MUZZLE: Crash was the first 3D videogame character to have different facial expressions for each of his 5,000+ frames of animation. Naughty Dog didn't want to waste this on a face that was too small to see. Crash is two-fifths head and more than one-fifth mouth.

COLOR: Orange. Simple, and different. There is no other significant orange character that we are aware of in the videogame world ... Orange is excited, but not angry like red. It is, Naughty Dog believes, the perfect color choice.

Sarah Bryant

CREATOR: Yu Suzuki and the AM2 division, Sega
BORN: 1994
LEADING ROLES: *Virtua Fighter*, *Virtua Fighter 2*, *Virtua Fighter 3*
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? A strong female character in a previously male-dominated genre

Interview is with Yu Suzuki and Eric Hammond, VP of product development for Sega of America

Where did the idea for Sarah come from?
EH: Brainstorming, just like all the other characters.

How did this idea evolve and change as Sarah developed?
EH: Sarah has been pretty consistent throughout the *Virtua Fighter* series. From the fighting game perspective, you can see her strengths come from her leg attacks, and that has evolved in the *Virtua Fighter* series. One of the goals for the *Virtua Fighter* series was to portray realistic combat while still making a game. One of the ways to do this is to improve the graphics. As you can see, the Sarah Bryant model has changed dramatically from *Virtua Fighter* to *Virtua Fighter 3*.

What do you see as Sarah's defining characteristics?
YS: [Sarah] is designed as a fighting machine, brainwashed by some evil organization.

What feelings is Sarah designed to evoke from the player?
EH: It's up to the player to decide what feelings Sarah is going to evoke. On one hand, Sarah is a damsel in distress, being a college student brainwashed by a sinister organization, where you have her brother Jackie trying to rescue her. But on the other hand, Sarah can be thought of as the "bad" girl popular in comic books, who knows how to handle herself and take on all comers.

To what extent does Sarah's form follow her function?
YS: Programming enables the character on the screen to show painful expressions when it is attacked.

What's the secret of Sarah's success?
YS: A lot depends on the characteristics that she exhibits, but on a practical level, Sarah is a character that can be played by either beginners or experts.

Aside from Sarah, what are your favorite game characters, and why?
EH: One favorite has been Shun Di, who uses a drunken style of kung fu. This style of fighting is not only fun to play, but fun to watch as well. Another reason why Shun Di is a favorite among gamers is that Shun was the first truly unorthodox fighter to appear in a fighting game.

Can any common attributes be identified in all successful characters?
EH: In creating successful characters, there must always be something that appeals to the main population, whether it's looks or personality.

Do gamers watch the lead character or take on the role of the lead character?
YS: With *Virtua Fighter*, I think players tend to talk about each character's role, technique, and ability, so yes, I do believe they take on and identify with the character.

How does this affect a character's design?
EH: You want to give the character special attributes that will make someone want to be on that character's team — something that will make someone want to be associated with that character. In Sarah's case, she's got an attractive, all-American look and some fierce kicks.

How do different characters resonate with different audiences?
EH: The beauty of fighting games is that different players have a variety of reasons for choosing a character, either for cool moves or combos, a particular style, or even personality.

How do today's technical limitations restrict a game character's development?
YS: In regard to home videogame consoles, the facial expressions are limited and therefore influenced by the number of polygons that the machine can cope with.

HER LONG LEGS: These can be used to emphasize leg attacks, which are a strong point in *Virtua Fighter*.

CLOTHES: They allow her to have a sense of style while still being combat-ready. They also serve possibly as a distraction.

HAIRSTYLE: Sarah's preferred hairstyle, the ponytail, is practical in martial arts, especially since there's no hair pulling in the *Virtua Fighter* series.

EARRINGS: Did you know her earrings have different colors, depending on what stage she's in (*VF3*)? She's got style.



Leisure Suit Larry

CREATOR: Al Lowe, Sierra
BORN: 1986
LEADING ROLES: *Leisure Suit Larry*, *Leisure Suit Larry 2*, *3*, *4*, *5*, and *6*
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? Don't laugh. The fact is that Larry remains the single most widely played PC game character in history (and yes, software piracy is largely to blame)

Where did the idea for Leisure Suit Larry come from?

(Al Lowe) **Way back in late 1986, the Paleolithic period of computer gaming, I felt the time was ripe for a game that I didn't see anywhere else. A game that dealt with mature subject matter, but did it with a sense of humor. Back then, computer games were terribly serious: Everything was save the princess, save the world, save the galaxy! And they were always set in fantastic settings: medieval times, other worlds. I felt the time was ripe for a game set in current times, with people that might actually exist. Also, I needed a character who could be the butt of all my jokes.**



How did this idea evolve and change as Larry developed?

Are you talking about the shape of his nose? I think that's just a coincidence, don't you? When we started, Mark Crowe [the artist who single-handedly created all the backgrounds and animations for *Larry 1* in one month while he was also working full time on *Space Quest* with Scott Murphy] gave me a choice: Larry could have either a huge nose or no nose because with only 160 pixels horizontally, his "nose pixel" could be either on or off. Later, as graphics developed, Larry's look became more refined, but always in keeping with his loser image.

What do you see as Larry's defining characteristics?

I tried to make him the opposite of a *GQ* model: short, overweight, balding, with comb-over hair, and so on. Larry is out of shape, losing his hair, not very successful with women, always thinking about sex — in other words, he's exactly like most guys.

What feelings is Larry designed to evoke from the player?

Pity. Empathy. Flaccidity? Seriously, the tough part was making Larry likable, since at first glance, he comes off as smarmy, sexist, and unlikable. I tried to make Larry resemble most guys I know: neither morons nor geniuses, basically honest and good, with a desire for more sex than they actually get. Men relate to Larry because no matter how big a loser you are, you're not as bad off as Larry!

Sierra surveyed *Larry* players and found that they strongly match the gameplaying population in general, with one exception: A higher proportion are women! My theory is that women relate to Larry because at least once they've all dated a jerk like him.

How are Larry's appearance and the game world connected?

His world wasn't really defined until after *Larry 3*. Bill Davis [lately of Rocket Science] loved a certain wacky art style and convinced me it was right for Larry. Bill Skirvin [who still holds the record for most *Larry* games as art director] perfected it, along with the subliminal sexual imagery.

What's the secret of Larry's success?

I believe it comes from several things: being in the right place at the right time, being unlike anything else out there. The games look like they're about sex, which interests damn near everybody. Of course, when people first play the game, they discover it's really about humor. But the humor isn't highbrow or high concept, it's simple, up-front, and obvious.

The puzzles are more accessible than in many adventure games. And there's a clear story line. Larry is easy to laugh at. He has simple needs and desires that anyone can relate to. The games run on most recent computers, and that's been true even from the very beginning. I've never been interested in advancing the state of the art, just in letting the maximum number of people laugh at my gags.

Finally, I think the strength of my games lies in their humor. When I write the thousands of lines in each game, I always envision a bunch of guys sitting around, shooting the shit, drinking a little, lying a little, laughing at each other's bad jokes, having a fun time.

HEAD: When we got to VGA, I wanted to show more facial expressions. But because VGA doesn't have that many more pixels, I made his head bigger. When it became approximately the same size as the entire rest of his body, I thought it was time to quit!

BALD SPOT: The only thing more insulting than thinning hair is a guy trying to disguise his thinning hair with a comb-over. Three hairs is funnier than two or four — when it comes to jokes, there is a rule of three.

NOSE: Back when noses were either on or off (since we had only one pixel of resolution for a nose), I went with on. Later, as resolution increased, his nose became a wonderful source of phallic references.

CLOTHING: He wears a leisure suit, a Hawaiian shirt, a gold medallion, and a chest toupee because I wanted him to be as out of it as possible.

successfully introduced characters to the racing genre with the *Mario Kart* series. *Tomb Raider*, led by Lara Croft, broke through to be the biggest hit of the last few years. Blizzard blended realtime strategy gameplay with wonderful touches of personality to great success with *WarCraft*. *Duke Nukem 3D* — although it never boasted the genre's slickest graphics engine or even, arguably, the most compelling gameplay — introduced an engaging personality and grabbed a cult following.

Personalities and characters do two things. First, they provide an extra appealing element to the game. It's the same principle as news broadcasts on TV. The TV networks know that they have to deliver good news content. But what keeps people tuning in regularly is a like and trust of the personalities in front of the camera. Second, they help attract the attention of people who otherwise may not have picked the game up. "What Lara has managed to do is get into people's offices, get into people's homes, and spread the idea of videogames to an audience that normally would never encounter them," says Core Design's Jeremy Smith. The lesson learned? Personalities work. No wonder Nintendo refers to Mario and its pantheon of characters as its "crown jewels." The question, then, is what makes a great videogame character? And how do you go about inventing one?

"Creating your own Sonic or Mario is incredibly difficult," advises Kelly Flock, president of Sony's 989 Studios, "and pulling it off is the game industry's home run — it's more than that, it's two grand slams in the same inning." So what are the rules in creating a successful videogame character? And what makes the difference between a Sonic the Hedgehog and a Jazz Jackrabbit?

Duke Nukem

CREATOR: Scott Miller, 3D Realms
BORN: 1990
LEADING ROLES: *Duke Nukem 1* and *2*, *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Duke Nukem Forever*
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? Duke proved that first-person 3D shooters and personality can mix. And since he broke the mold, no one's done it better

Where did the idea for Duke come from, and how has he evolved and changed?

(Scott Miller) **Duke was originally created by myself and Todd Replogle in 1990, and the first *Duke Nukem* [an EGA side-scrolling shooter] was released as shareware in mid-1991. The game was the biggest shareware success until *Wolfenstein 3D*'s release a year later. *Duke Nukem 2* came out late in 1993 as another side-scroller, and with VGA graphics. Almost immediately after that game's release, Todd began *Duke Nukem 3D* (a name I selected, since it was really the third in the series) early in 1994 using our Build engine, which was still a work in progress, and without many of the features it later came to have. Duke was originally conceived as a brash, never-say-die action hero for our modern times. But it wasn't until *Duke Nukem 3D* that we were able to infuse him with attitude and ego, through his voice (mostly managed by George Broussard), through the game environments (including strip clubs), and by adding his shades (my idea).**

What do you see as Duke's defining characteristics?

Duke is a modern-day John Wayne. He's patriotic, a chauvinist, and shoots first. Duke doesn't negotiate, except with big guns. He's short on words but long on action.

What feelings is Duke designed to evoke from the player?

I don't think we've ever thought about it in that way. When a player plays a Duke Nukem game, it's a chance to be someone who's fearless and physically equipped to handle most any conflict. Duke's a man's man, and for most of us, it's a fantasy to play a hero like that.

How are Duke's appearance and the game world connected?

To a big extent — especially in the coming *Duke Nukem Forever* — the environments are designed to take advantage of Duke's attributes. In *Duke Nukem 3D*, Los Angeles was the perfect backdrop for Duke, and in the next game, Las Vegas will provide another playground for Duke's adventure, with casinos, strip clubs, and plenty of material for gags.

What's the secret of Duke's success?

***Duke* is maybe the first game that captures the essence and attitude of an Arnold-style action movie.**



SHADES: Duke's shades are undoubtedly his key signature item. This idea initially met a little resistance internally because the conventional wisdom was that players needed to see a character's eyes in order to better connect with that character. But often rules must be broken, and this was certainly a case example.

CLOTHES: Duke doesn't wear armor or protective clothing (at least in the pictures of him — he does find protection in the games). This emphasizes that Duke is so confident that he doesn't bother with protection of this sort. Duke's skimpy, tight tank top is all he needs. I'd like to see in *Duke Nukem Forever* all armor and shielding dropped from the game to further emphasize Duke's confidence, but I'm meeting internal resistance because conventional wisdom says all shooters must have armor for the player to find. Conventional wisdom, unfortunately, leads to clones and been-there-done-thats.

BELT: Duke's nuclear belt buckle is an important part of his appearance, though I'm not sure what it represents for the character, other than reinforcing his name.

HAIR: Duke's good looks and crew-cut blonde hair are important in pushing the fantasy that Duke is a man among men, and quite the womanizer, too.

MOUTH: Duke's voice is also critically important. We selected a voice that was deep, gruff, and confident — a cross between John Wayne and Clint Eastwood.

Clearly, the number-one requirement for any budding character is a great game. Even the most worthy and charming character will sink if the game in which he or she stars is no fun to play. This sounds obvious, but all too many game developers — whether through bad judgment or lack of talent — spend too much time hyping the hero and not enough time polishing the gameplay. This point is not lost on Shigeru Miyamoto, the creator of Mario and the most plagiarized designer in the industry. "Our games are often imitated," he acknowledges. "Unfortunately, our competitors seem to simply try to imitate the surface and just end up making very badly balanced games. They never try to understand why and how we have done what we do to achieve each game's content."

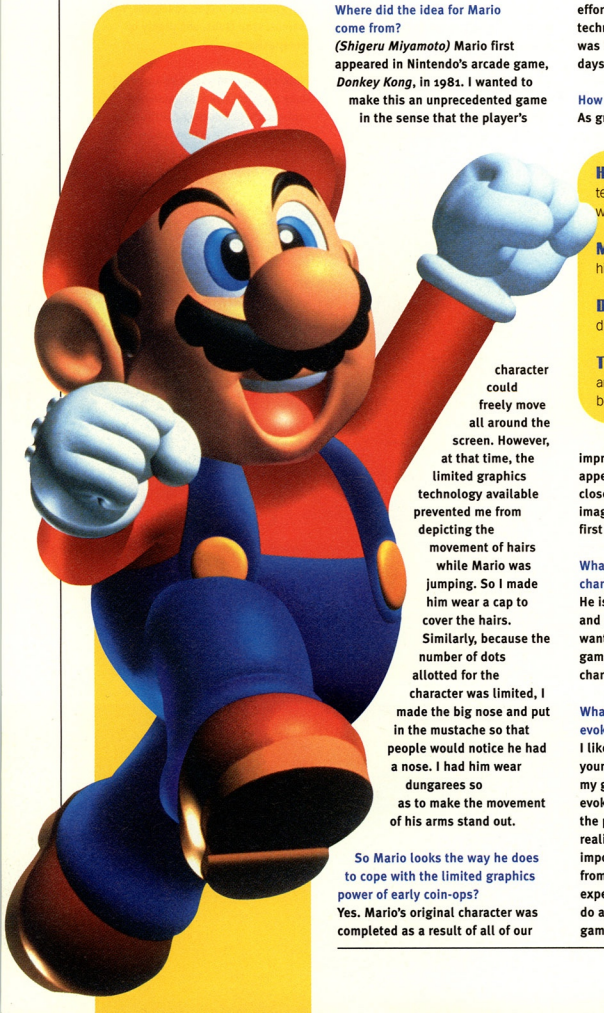
Assuming gameplay is in place, what is that "extra something" that makes some characters stand out from the crowd? "Number one, they've got to be likable," says Naughty Dog's Jason Rubin, creator of Crash Bandicoot. "Whether the character is human, animal, alien, or other, if players don't like the character, then they're not going to want to spend time with the character. Personally, I like PaRappa, who has a good deal of personality and really inspires the player to try to help him."

Another rule of thumb is that game characters need to be consistent. To this end, most game publishers will create and constantly update a database of information about their character. "We keep a very tight rein on Lara," reveals Core Design's Smith. "We have a large bible of information back at Core that kind of keeps track of her personality. We know what her favorite color is, we know what kind of restaurant she'd like to go to and what she'd probably order when she got there, and we know what music

(continued on page 88)

Mario

CREATOR: Shigeru Miyamoto, Nintendo
BORN: 1981
LEADING ROLES: *Donkey Kong*, *Donkey Kong Jr.*, *Mario Bros.*, *Super Mario Bros. 1*, *2*, and *3*, *Super Mario Land 1* and *2*, *Dr. Mario*, *Super Mario World*, *Super Mario Kart*, *Mario Paint*, *Super Mario All Stars*, *Mario and Wario*, *Yoshi's Safari*, *Mario's Picross*, *Mario's Tennis*, *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*, *Mario Clash*, *Super Mario 64*, *Mario Kart 64*, *Yoshi's Story*
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? The most popular game character of all time. As of 1995 (Nintendo gave up counting after then), 120 million *Mario* game carts had been sold



Where did the idea for Mario come from?
(Shigeru Miyamoto) **Mario first appeared in Nintendo's arcade game, *Donkey Kong*, in 1981. I wanted to make this an unprecedented game in the sense that the player's character could freely move all around the screen. However, at that time, the limited graphics technology available prevented me from depicting the movement of hairs while Mario was jumping. So I made him wear a cap to cover the hairs. Similarly, because the number of dots allotted for the character was limited, I made the big nose and put in the mustache so that people would notice he had a nose. I had him wear dungarees so as to make the movement of his arms stand out.**

So Mario looks the way he does to cope with the limited graphics power of early coin-ops?
Yes. Mario's original character was completed as a result of all of our efforts to cope with limited technology. In other words, Mario was born of rational design in the days of immature technology.

How has Mario evolved over time?
As graphics technologies continue to improve and advance, the way Mario appears in his games is getting closer and closer to the original image I had in mind when he was first created.

What do you see as Mario's defining characteristics?
He is a clown, a middle-aged man, and full of a sense of justice. As I want him to appear in a variety of games, I refrain from defining his characteristics any more exactly.

What feelings is Mario designed to evoke from the player?
I like the expression "to evoke" in your question. What I emphasize in my game design is an attempt to evoke the actual past experiences of the players. For example, a desire to realize something exhilarating but impossible in real life (judging from the player's own past experience) or something dreadful to do always lies at the basis of my game designing.

We are designing Mario and all the surrounding characters so that players can feel the joy and tension to run and fly freely in the virtual fantasy world.

To what extent is Mario defined by the game world in which he lives?
When I start designing a game, I always begin by thinking of what I want players to do and experience. In other words, even when doing a sequel to a popular *Mario* game, I do not automatically have any specific ideas as to what it should be like. Mario's characteristics are very flexible, and his appearance is suited for very strong actions. This is why he has been able to act in so many different games, even though nearly 20 years have passed and hardware technologies have rapidly evolved since his debut.

HAT: Mario's appearance is a result of 1981's rudimentary graphics technology. There simply weren't enough pixels to display him any other way. He wears a hat because his hair wouldn't look realistic.

MUSTACHE: Mario's mustache is used to help differentiate his nose and his mouth.

DUNGAREES: Mario wears dungarees because his arms needed to be a different color from his body in order for his arms to be seen moving.

THE "M" ON HIS CAP: Later, the "M" was introduced to Mario's cap as an additional means of identification (and to help gamers differentiate between Mario and Wario, who has a "W" on his cap).

Having said that, I don't let Mario appear in just any kind of game. For example, Mario could not show up in *Zelda* games. They are two distinct game worlds. When I think of defining a game world, I like to think of how the air of the game world would feel on the player's skin.

Aside from Mario, who is your favorite game character, and why?
I attach myself to all the characters I make. If I have to choose one, it should be Donkey Kong, since it was the first game for which I was assigned to the responsibility of the major design.

What's the secret of Mario's success?
I believe the primary reason for Mario's success has been the fact that the games themselves are very fun to play, even though the basic game design has not been changed since the early '80s.

Lara Croft

CREATOR: Toby Gard, formerly of Core
BORN: 1996
LEADING ROLES: *Tomb Raider*, *Tomb Raider Gold*, *Tomb Raider II*, *Tomb Raider III*
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? Millions of games sold, a movie in the works for 1999, for starters

Where did the idea for Lara come from?
(Toby Gard) **I suppose more directly the idea for Lara came from a mixture of Indiana Jones films, Tank Girl, and the images of strong women like Neneh Cherry.**

How did this idea evolve and change as Lara developed?
Lara was pretty well-defined from the beginning. Specifically, I wanted her to be a very British autocratic person, thus adding to her unattainable air: measured, cool, self-reliant.

What do you see as Lara's defining characteristics?
Athletic, attractive, and dangerous.

What feelings is Lara designed to evoke from the player?
Well, it's hard to second-guess what people actually feel when playing Lara, but the idea was that both men and women would emote better with a woman character, for different reasons. Since you are external to Lara, I thought that men would feel that they were guiding this girl through these dangerous situations and might get a feeling of "protecting" her through their guidance. I thought that women would emote better with Lara than with the beefy meat heads that generally are made for such games, simply because her character was not being portrayed in a way that is degrading for women (even if she isn't exactly a feminist icon).

How are Lara's appearance and the game world connected?
The whole game world of *Tomb Raider* is utterly dependent on Lara's size and animations. The distances she can jump, reach, run forward, and fall are totally set variables. In this way, she is completely suited to her world, and her world is designed for her to exist in. If it were any different, it wouldn't work.

What's the secret of Lara's success?
Lara's success came primarily from the fact that the game was good at the time. All the successful characters have the same thing in common — a good game. You cannot have a good character in a crap game because then everyone would perceive the character as crap too. It's exactly the same as a character in a film. It's not the costume they are wearing or what their face looks like, it's what they do and how they do it.

Aside from Lara, what are your favorite game characters, and why?
Mario is a funny little character, but I love him in *Mario 64*. Earthworm Jim is a great character, and he has bags of personality. I like Sonic because he's so fast and weird.
I like the lead character from *Nights* because he moved so damn well. And finally I love Ben from *Full Throttle* for being the coolest game character ever.

Can any common attributes be identified in all successful characters?
A great game!

Do gamers watch the lead character or take on the role of the lead character?
I think it depends on the game. Generally speaking, if it's third-person, then you're watching and controlling a character external to yourself. This allows us to give that character more personality of their own, and the player, suitably distanced, doesn't find it disconcerting when the character does things of its own accord. In a first-person game you can't do that because you're meant to be taking on that role, and as a player you expect to put all the personality of that character in yourself.

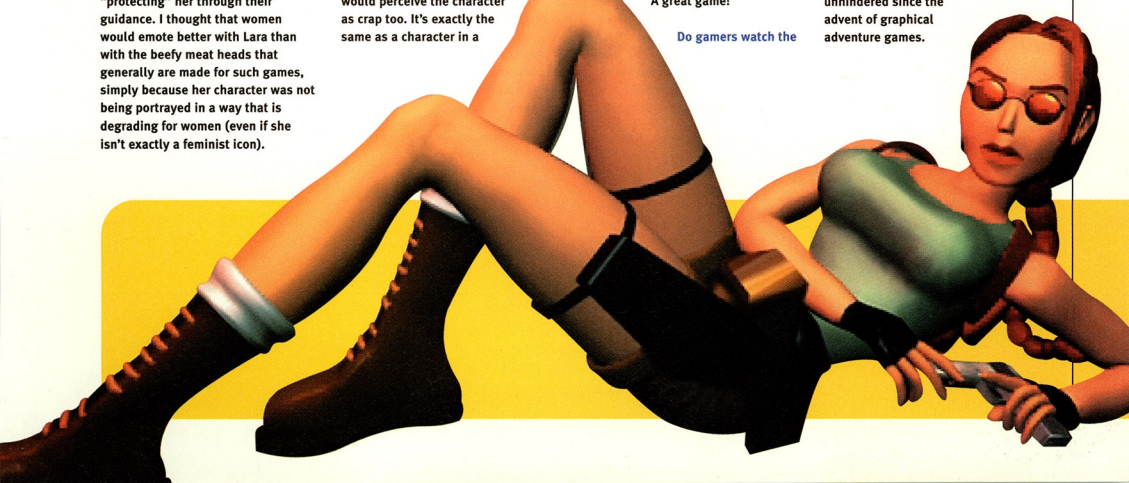
How does this affect a character's design?
I'm not sure it does, except in so much as you might not make a character like Sonic the Hedgehog for a first-person game. Then again, maybe you would. After all, there are no rules, are there?

How do today's technical limitations restrict a game character's development?
To be honest with you, I don't think that we have much in the way of technical limitations when it comes to character development. At this point in time we can pretty much make whatever we like. I think anyone who is griping about limitations at this point is too much of a stickler for realism. So long as we are still trying to make games rather than lifelike simulations, there's virtually nothing that the current hardware can't handle in making the whole *game*! The character development has been unhindered since the advent of graphical adventure games.

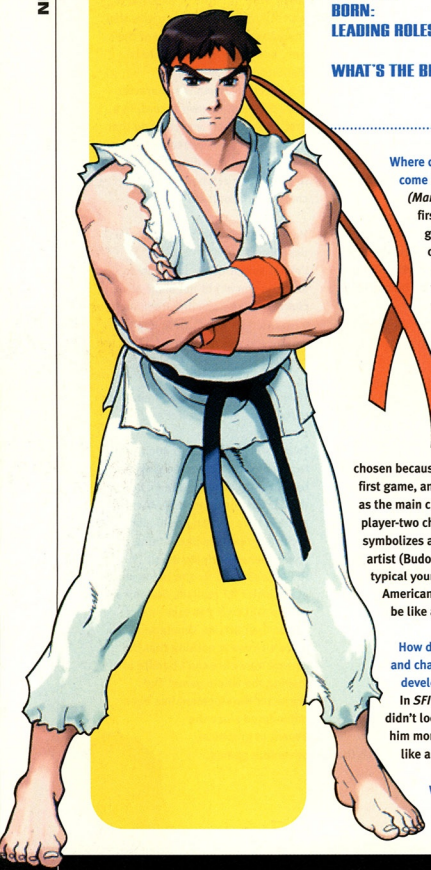
CHEST: Lara's chief asset, designed to appeal to the male gamer.

SHADES: An essential style element, designed to give Ms. Croft a cool appearance, as well as toughen her up, Duke Nukem style.

BACKPACK: The real reason she has a backpack is to hide a join in the 3D mesh of the character, but it obviously suits her Indiana Jones heritage.



Ryu



CREATOR: Manabu Takemura, Capcom
BORN: 1988
LEADING ROLES: *Street Fighter*, *Street Fighter II*, and every *Street Fighter* game since

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

The star and default player one of the most successful fighting game series ever. Of all the *SF* superstars, Ryu is everyman

Where did the idea for Ryu come from?

(Manabu Takemura) In the first *Street Fighter* game, Ryu was the only playable character, so we wanted someone that many people would identify with. When we were creating *Street Fighter II*, we had to come up with eight playable characters. Ryu and Ken were chosen because they were in the first game, and they match up well as the main character and the player-two character. Ryu symbolizes a Japanese martial artist (Budoka), while Ken is a typical young person who likes American culture and wants to be like an American.

How did this idea evolve and change as Ryu developed?

In *SFI*, Ryu was thinner and didn't look so strong. I made him more muscular, to look like a real martial artist.

What do you see as Ryu's defining characteristics?

His white karate uniform. Players will know he is a karate master at first sight.

What feelings is Ryu designed to evoke from the player?

It's up to the gameplayer what they feel. We don't expect particular feelings from them. But he has definitely become an essential part of the *Street Fighter* world. If we were to make a *Street Fighter* game without Ryu, quite a few players would say "no."

What's the secret of Ryu's success?

Ryu is successful because *Street Fighter II* was a big hit, and Ryu represented the game.

Aside from Ryu, what are your favorite game characters, and why?

Chun Li, Guile, Megaman. I like a character that is recognizably beautiful, tough, or simple.

Can any common attributes be identified in all successful game characters?

Being in a game that makes a big hit and taking a great part in making that game a hit. I think the best character is the one that is fun to play or that players feel compelled to play with. I try to keep these goals in my mind while designing a character.

How do different characters resonate with different audiences?

All gameplayers are not the same. This is why we created *Street Fighter II* with eight different player characters.

How do today's technical limitations restrict a game character's development?

There are no technical limitations beyond our imagination. There are many things that I can think of and that couldn't be realized. But I don't think it's a limitation — it's a challenge. And I'm very happy when I try to overcome these difficulties.

HAIR BAND: It shows his fighting spirit. Japanese people sometimes wear hachimaki when they are facing a hardship or are determined to do something difficult.

BLACK BELT: Ryu is a master of karate. The sharpness of his moves (kicks, punches, shoryuken, hadoken) is also shown by the movement of the belt.

TORN KARATE UNIFORM: At first sight, you can guess how hard his training was. He experienced quite a few fights before his uniform was torn.

BARE FEET: He is a devoted fighter and does not care that he fights barefoot. As you know, karate is an indoor sport. But devoted karate fighters train themselves in such severe conditions as fighting barefoot outdoors or swimming in winter.

she likes." Nintendo has a similar dossier of information on Mario, and Sega has its "Sonic bible."

Characters also have to be distinctive. "As the word 'character' implies," Miyamoto says, "it is very important that characters have distinguishable features." In other words, characters have to stand out from the crowd. Witness the fact that Sonic, a hedgehog, is blue. Crash Bandicoot is bright orange. Duke Nukem wears shades, even in the dark. And Lara, well, we all know about Lara's standout features.

But as well as being likable and distinctive, the best characters resonate with players on a deeper level. "The player needs to understand the motives and personality of a character. Otherwise it's difficult for there to be a connection," says 3D Realms' Scott Miller, the creator of Duke Nukem. "And we believe that character speech is a key way of communicating — literally — a character's personality." The belief in the need for the player to understand the game character is echoed by Naughty Dog's Rubin. "The reason why I enjoy many of the characters from the *Tekken* series is because the authors seem to have given them enough inner conflict to make them less shallow than characters from other fighting games," he says. Kenji Mimurao of SquareSoft, the creator of *Final Fantasy*'s Cloud, concurs. "I think [success can be] as simple as being cute, cool, and attractive ... [but] it's also very important to be able to sympathize with a character, to relate to its emotions."

This raises an interesting possibility. Perhaps it's not too far-fetched to suggest that the very best characters, rather than offering an escape from our own lives, in fact work because on a basic level, they resonate with our notion of ourselves. "If millions of children and adults melded with Mario, it may not be simply a matter of our shortening attention spans, our craving for novelty, or our susceptibility to expensive ad campaigns," wrote Scott Rosenberg in a 1991 issue of the *San Francisco Examiner's Image* magazine. "It may be that in Mario's fate — stuck in a world not of his own choosing, charged with a nearly

Sonic the Hedgehog

CREATOR: Yuji Naka, Sega

BORN: 1991

LEADING ROLES: *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, *Sonic CD*, *Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine*, *Sonic the Hedgehog 3*, *Sonic and Knuckles*, *Sonic Drift*, *Sonic Chaos*, *Sonic the Hedgehog Triple Trouble*, *Sonic Blast*, *Sonic Drift 2*, *Tails Sky Patrol*, *Tails Adventure*, *Sonic Labyrinth*, *Sonic 3D Blast*, *Sonic Jam*, *Sonic Spinball*, *Knuckles Chaotix*, *SegaSonic Arcade*, *Sonic the Fighters*, *Sonic R*

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? Gave the seemingly untouchable Mario a run for his money and was largely responsible for the success of the Genesis console



Where did the idea for Sonic come from?
(Yuji Naka) **At first, we wanted to make an entire game running full speed, which we had never seen before, and the character was born from there.**

How did this idea evolve and change as Sonic developed?
We managed to express stirring feelings by his speed. We improved his design to be available to run on a round-shaped ground as well as straight and flat ones. Furthermore, we succeeded in making him run on a loop. In order not to lose his speed and to attack, we made him curl himself up like a ball when he jumped.

What do you see as Sonic's defining characteristics?
He is cool and the fastest hedgehog in the world.

What feelings is Sonic designed to evoke from the player?
He will make action as soon as he thinks of it. He can't bear staying calm.

To what extent does Sonic's form follow his function?
He can run fast. He becomes irritated when the player leaves him alone. He can attack his enemies by rolling in high speed because curling his own body is his offensive preparation.

What's the secret of Sonic's success?
He not only is an honored character but is also seen as a reliable friend to young people.

HEAD SHAPE: His acute-shaped head symbolizes his speed.

SPIKES: He's the anti-Mario. Mario is rounded, whereas Sonic is spiked and therefore tougher-looking [a key aspect of the Genesis ad campaigns].

SHOES: Sonic has to run fast, so he has running shoes.

COLOR: Sonic turned blue when he broke the sound barrier.

worst failures

Of course, not every character finds its audience — in fact, some couldn't even find their own, um, *noses* with both hands. These few stunning examples of total personality vacuums can kill through sheer boredom.

BUBSY



ZOOL



BUG



MR. NUTZ



impossible mission, doomed to perish sooner or later, yet free while he lives to grow, learn, slay demons, and stop to smell the Fire Flowers — people are catching a crude, bright, hypnotic reflection of their own lives."

As new graphics technologies are applied to game characters, the relationship between player and character will become more complex. At the moment, we can't have a conversation with our game heroes, and our interaction is limited to simply guiding them around physical terrain and getting them to shoot enemies or pick up objects. But as technologies like speech recognition, superior artificial intelligence, and even artificial life technology are used in creating these characters, the relationship will deepen.

This is an ongoing evolution, and the designers of today enjoy considerably more artistic freedom and a broader palette than in the past. "There is much more freedom today than there was during the 16-bit era," says Rubin. "Back then, you only had 16 colors and often just a 32x32 pixel sprite to create the character image and personality." Nowadays, designers can let their imaginations run a little wilder, and technology is enabling designers to realize their visions a little more fully. "People may think that such characters as Mario and Link have been improved significantly thanks to the state-of-the-art graphics technology of N64," argues Shigeru Miyamoto, "but the fact is that they are simply approaching my original concepts."

In these pages, **Next Generation** presents the creators of 10 of gaming's most successful characters. What comes through from their experiences is that character creation is no science — and from the 10 characters in the spotlight come 10 different stories of how they came to be. What links them together is great gameplay, first and foremost, but also a sense of wholeness and truth. All these characters are loved — both by their creators and gameplayers. After all, more than 500,000 man years have been clocked up by gamers around the world in the company of Mario. He must be doing something right.

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NINTENDO 64

THE NEXT GENERATION

NG previews 60 upcoming N64 games

As PlayStation slowly loses its relevance to hardcore gamers and Dreamcast looms ever larger on the horizon, Nintendo 64 is — finally — starting to get the kinds of games and support that Nintendo promised when the system launched two years ago. Developers finally have a handle on the system, as *Zelda* will usher in the second generation of Nintendo 64 software.

As developers finally come up to speed, real innovation is taking place on the system. Given the derivative state of PlayStation software today, it is likely that the most innovative and exciting software will be on Nintendo 64, at least until Dreamcast arrives. Across the next five pages, we examine the games that will define this new, more mature phase of Nintendo 64 development. If even a third of these games ships on time, 1999 will certainly be remembered as Nintendo 64's year.

THE NEXT 12 MONTHS WILL BE THE MOST IMPORTANT IN THE CONSOLE'S LIFE CYCLE ...

Asteroids 64

Publisher: Crave Entertainment
Developer: Utopia
Release Date: TBA 1999

***Asteroids* receives a 64-bit update courtesy of Crave Entertainment and developer Utopia (best known for *Montezuma's Return*). According to Crave, *Asteroids 64* is completely different from Activision's PlayStation version. The game will feature an exclusive 3D polygonal engine, developed by Utopia, and a four-player battle mode when it hits Nintendo 64 sometime next year.**



1080° SNOWBOARDING 2

PUBLISHER: **Nintendo**
DEVELOPER: **EAD**
RELEASE DATE: **Q4 1999**

Using an enhanced version of the original engine, *1080° Snowboarding 2* will feature new tracks and players, along with an improved stunt mode. With input this time from Miyamoto himself, this is as close to a sure hit as Nintendo has.

4X4 MUD MONSTERS

PUBLISHER: **Take 2/G.O.D.**
DEVELOPER: **Edge of Reality/Terminal Reality**
RELEASE DATE: **March 1999**

Headed by ex-Iguana programmer Rob Cohen, *4x4 Mud Monsters* brings monster truck racing to the N64. Using a version of Terminal Reality's Photex2 engine, *Mud Monsters* will emphasize realistic mud physics with varying degrees of friction and plenty of dirt spray.

ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2000

PUBLISHER: **Acclaim**
DEVELOPER: **Iguana**
RELEASE DATE: **April 1999**

Tentatively dubbed *ASB 2000*, the sequel to Acclaim's hit baseball start-up promises better play control, faster game mechanics, updated rosters, an expanded create-a-player function, more player animations, and an instant replay mode. It should also expand upon the original's well-

Attack!

Publisher: DMA Design
Developer: DMA Design
Release Date: TBA

Scottish developer DMA Design (*Body Harvest*, *Grand Theft Auto*) is working on a unique and (no surprise) demented 3D action/platformer starring a cast of dinosaurs and cavemen. The game is reportedly "sadistic in a cute way," but DMA, which is getting better with every release, is withholding details, beyond stating emphatically that it is not a next generation *Lemmings*.



Body Harvest

Publisher: Midway
Developer: DMA Design
Release Date: October 1998

Originally slated to be published by Nintendo, this Scottish gem about a lone hero who tries to save the planet from becoming a smorgasbord for space bugs was snatched up by Midway. *Body Harvest*, which features a large variety of vehicles, successfully mixes action, shooting, driving, and role-playing into a unique spoof on '60s sci-fi horror flicks.



received, high-resolution graphics mode, ironing out frame rate hitches and slow-down.

BANJO-TOOIE

PUBLISHER: **Nintendo**
DEVELOPER: **Rare**
RELEASE DATE: **TBA 1999**

Rare announced this sequel to gamers during the ending sequences of the current reigning platformer, *Banjo-Kazooie*. Sporting an equally bizarre moniker, *Banjo-Tooie* will enable players to revisit the environments of the first game with the help of some imaginative code work.

BATTLEZONE

PUBLISHER: **Crave Entertainment**
DEVELOPER: **Utopia**
RELEASE DATE: **TBA**

Crave's port of Activision's updated classic puts players in a polygonal 3D world, where strategy and action go hand-in-hand. In a fashion similar to that seen in *Uprising*, players control an army of units and vehicles, manage resources, build bases, and strategically attack enemies. A multiplayer mode is still being considered. If the N64 update is as good as the PC one, fans should have one fantastic game to look forward to.

BLADES OF STEEL '98

PUBLISHER: **Konami**
DEVELOPER: **KCEO/Major A**
RELEASE DATE: **Q1 1999**

Konami is resurrecting its legendary ice hockey series with a full-fledged 64-bit sequel. The four-player arcade hockey game is reportedly being developed in conjunction with developer Major A of *International Superstar Soccer* fame and will likely use the same engine as the five-star soccer hit.

BUST-A-MOVE 3

PUBLISHER: **Acclaim**
DEVELOPER: **Probe/Taito**
RELEASE DATE: **December 1998**

The sequel to the addictive 2D puzzler will introduce a four-player, split-screen mode to the *Bust-A-Move* series. The age-old objective is unchanged: Line up three bubbles of the same color to make them pop.

CARMAGEDDON 64

PUBLISHER: **Interplay**
DEVELOPER: **Stainless**
RELEASE DATE: **Q1 1999**

Carmageddon, the gory racer that awards players for killing innocent bystanders in unique and creative ways, is a rare example of a title that successfully combines over-the-top blood with solid gameplay. Nintendo 64 owners will be graced with a special incarnation of the game, featuring exclusive levels, vehicles, and a multiplayer mode.

Castlevania

Publisher: Konami
Developer: KCEK
Release Date: December 1998

The *Castlevania* series receives a 3D polygonal makeover for its trip to Nintendo 64. The game, which we doubt will make its December release, enables gamers to play as one of four vampire-slaying characters. Konami has engineered an interesting dynamic daylight/nightfall system that directly affects gameplay. The 3D world adds a depth of maneuverability and options never before attained in the franchise.



Extreme-G 2

Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Probe
Release Date: October 1998

This sequel promises new, widened tracks, more vehicles, tighter control, a greater sense of speed, and enhanced graphics with realtime lighting effects. British developer Probe has replaced the original's out-of-control multiplayer mode with a tank-based, four-player battle that should please.



COMMAND & CONQUER 3D

PUBLISHER: **Westwood Studios**
DEVELOPER: **Westwood Studios**
RELEASE DATE: **TBA**

Westwood has been working on a polygonal sequel to its acclaimed realtime strategy series since last year. The company has kept a tight lid on the exact details, but N64 owners can expect the same wealth of military units and structures as the PC game.

DESTRUCTION DERBY 64

PUBLISHER: **Psygnosis**
DEVELOPER: **Psygnosis**
RELEASE DATE: **TBA 1999**

Originally one of PlayStation's system sellers, *Destruction Derby* is on its way to N64 with some new features. The prime objective is still to wreck other cars by crashing into them, but Psygnosis is putting more emphasis on the racing engine and car physics.

DONKEY KONG 64

PUBLISHER: **Rare**
DEVELOPER: **Rare**
RELEASE DATE: **TBA 1999**

Donkey Kong 64, in development for more than a year, promises to be Rare's most fantastic game ever. With *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Twelve Tales: Conker 64* as test models, the *DK* team has two commendable game engines to fall back on, and if tradition holds, things can only get better. Expect a four-player mode, a two-player cooperative challenge, and a combination of game engines for multiple styles of gameplay.

DUKE NUKEM: ZERO HOUR

PUBLISHER: **GT Interactive**
DEVELOPER: **Eurocom**
RELEASE DATE: **Q2 1999**

Zero Hour, a completely original *Duke Nukem* game from the team that ported *Mortal Kombat 4* to Nintendo 64, breaks the series' first-person mold for an over-the-shoulder view. Despite its new look, the game still puts emphasis on fast, mindless mayhem and wisecracking one-liners from the big guy.

EARTHBOUND 64

PUBLISHER: **Nintendo**
DEVELOPER: **EAD**
RELEASE DATE: **TBA 1999**

Originally touted as one of the launch titles for Nintendo's troubled 64DD add-on, *EarthBound 64* has since moved to a huge 256 megabit (32MB) cartridge. Unlike *Zelda*, the anticipated role-playing sequel relies on turn-based monster battles, often set in modern-day environments. The game

Glover

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Developer: Interactive Studios
Release Date: October 1998

This sleeper from N64 newcomers Hasbro and Interactive Studios features highly original gameplay and a charming hero. Players control a magic glove that must traverse levels while juggling, dribbling, and throwing a rubber ball, which can change material, depending on the environment.



The Legend of Zelda

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: EAD
Release Date: November 1998

Nintendo's 3D update to the classic *Zelda* series is easily one of the most anticipated games ever. Piloted by Shigeru Miyamoto and team, the 256 megabit cart sees Link travel through time and grow to adulthood as players struggle to rescue *Zelda*. Graphically, only Rare can compete. More than 40 hours of gameplay are promised when *Zelda* releases.



will also include a heavy dose of humor.

EARTHWORM JIM 3D

PUBLISHER: **Interplay**
DEVELOPER: **Vis Interactive**
RELEASE DATE: **November 1998**

In this game from Scotland-based Vis Interactive, Jim travels through the far reaches of his mind to recover his lost marbles. The polygonal platformer is said to rival the humor of the original 16-bit hits, with plenty of cow references and pig snowboarding.

FIFA '99

PUBLISHER: **EA Sports**
DEVELOPER: **EA Canada**
RELEASE DATE: **Q1 1999**

After a disappointing start, the *FIFA* soccer series is looking better. *FIFA '99* will bring back the popular team and player creation features that were missing from *World Cup '98*, as well as up the ante, with the usual lineup of audio/video enhancements.

GAUNTLET 64

PUBLISHER: **Midway**
DEVELOPER: **Atari Games**
RELEASE DATE: **TBA 1999**

Atari Games' graphically enhanced update to its popular arcade title *Gauntlet* is on its way to Nintendo 64 late next year. The game, employing an overhead view similar to the original's and running on a crisp 3D engine, features the same classic gameplay that made the series a hit to begin with. The Nintendo 64 version will boast a four-player deathmatch mode.

GT WORLD TOUR

PUBLISHER: **Midway**
DEVELOPER: **Boss Game Studios**
RELEASE DATE: **Q1 1999**

Top Gear Rally developer Boss is far into development of a *Gran Turismo*-style racer, with 10 international tracks from all over the world. *GT* will offer the ability to sign up with a specific racing team and sponsors. All choices will affect the car's basic configurations and performance.

HARVEST MOON

PUBLISHER: **Natsume**
DEVELOPER: **Pack-In Soft**
RELEASE DATE: **Q1 1999**

One of the few role-playing games scheduled for the system, *Harvest Moon* approaches the genre from a slightly different angle. Instead of having to fight monsters for wealth and fame, players defend their farm from enemies and try to make a decent living by growing vegetables and herding cattle.

NBA Jam '99

Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Iguana West
Release Date: November 1998

What can we say about *NBA Jam* that we haven't already said? Acclaim's tried-and-true *All-Star Baseball 99* engine is being used for this title that also features full NBA licensing, a five-on-five simulation mode, and, of course, arcadelike gameplay. Will it live up to the skill of Mark Trumell's original hit? Doubtful, but people will probably buy it anyway.



Need for Speed 64

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Paradigm
Release Date: TBA

EA's classic *Need for Speed* franchise makes the jump to 64-bit, courtesy of *F-1 World Grand Prix* developer Paradigm Entertainment. The game, running on a finely tuned 3D polygonal engine, features a plethora of Nintendo 64-exclusive tracks and vehicles, as well as Rumble Pak support and the series' trademark gameplay mechanics.



HYBRID HEAVEN

PUBLISHER: **Konami**
DEVELOPER: **KCEO**
RELEASE DATE: **March 1999**

As the name implies, *Hybrid Heaven* is a blend of genres including adventure, action, and role-playing. As hero Johnny Slader, players explore dark, futuristic scenes and fight intense battles against a motley crew of mutating creatures. Despite obvious similarities to *Metal Gear Solid*, the game will highlight realtime adventuring and turn-based combat over shooting and action.

HYPE: A TIME QUEST

PUBLISHER: **Ubi Soft**
DEVELOPER: **Playmobil**
RELEASE DATE: **Q1 1999**

Playmobil's Hype — A Time Quest, a game that plays curiously like *Zelda*, was one of the bigger surprises at E3. Boasting uncharacteristically well-done visuals and plot, the game follows the travels of Hype, a medieval knight who, curiously enough, travels back and forth between time on a quest to defeat the evil Black Knight.

JET FORCE GEMINI

PUBLISHER: **Rare**
DEVELOPER: **Rare**
RELEASE DATE: **Q1 1999**

Rare strays slightly from its platformer infatuation with *Jet Force Gemini* (see preview, page 46), a futuristic action/shooter in the style of *Blasto*. *Jet Force Gemini*, like all Rare games, features stunning visuals; huge, highly detailed worlds; and unsurpassed character design. The game also employs a four-player deathmatch mode, fast becoming a Nintendo 64 standard with games of this type. With Rare's reputation for perfection, this should be one fine game.

MADDEN 99

PUBLISHER: **EA Sports**
DEVELOPER: **Tiburon**
RELEASE DATE: **September 1998**

Last year's *Madden 64* looked dated compared to Acclaim's *QB Club 99*. EA Sports may have learned its lesson; *Madden 99* is running on an improved high-resolution engine, featuring up-to-date stats and the classic gameplay that has kept the franchise going through the years.

MICROMACHINES V3

PUBLISHER: **Midway**
DEVELOPER: **Codemasters**
RELEASE DATE: **November 1998**

In its N64 debut, Codemasters successfully takes the control and gameplay from the NES classic and applies it to polygonal environments. Multiple players compete head-to-head and try to outrun each other on

Ogre Battle 3

Publisher: TBA
Developer: Quest
Release Date: TBA

Quest only recently announced its intent to license its third *Ogre Battle* title out to potential U.S. publishers. Based on the original Super NES hit, *Ogre Battle 3* goes for the same mixture of role-playing and strategy while preserving the multitudes of character classes and detailed sprite-battle animations.



Perfect Dark

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare
Release Date: TBA 1999

This semi-sequel to Rare's landmark shooter *Goldeneye* introduces female undercover agent Joanna Dark. Players shoot their way through a plot right out of the "X-Files," involving government conspiracy and plenty of aliens. Expect lots of new weapons and targeting controls, as well as new and improved visuals and plenty of vehicles to ride.



miniature tracks, ranging from dinner tables to lily ponds.

NBA LIVE 99

PUBLISHER: **Electronics Arts**
DEVELOPER: **EA Sports**
RELEASE DATE: **November 1998**

The Nintendo 64 version of EA's *Live* franchise looks to be the best yet. *Live 99* features full NBA licensing, advanced custom-create options for teams and players (especially welcome because roster issues will be resolved late this year), improved AI, four-player matches, and Rumble Pak support. The visuals, from well-designed characters to smooth animation, are top-notch.

NFL BLITZ

PUBLISHER: **Midway**
DEVELOPER: **Midway**
RELEASE DATE: **September 1998**

The N64 version of *NFL Blitz* is a bit less flashy than it was in the arcades, but the two footballers play identically. Also, Midway has added some extra features like an in-game play editor, Rumble Pak support, and save options.

NHL 99

PUBLISHER: **EA Sports**
DEVELOPER: **EA Canada**
RELEASE DATE: **October 1998**

EA is planning to improve on last year's excellent hockey sim with faster gameplay, multiple in-game strategies, and better AI. Features like neutral zone play, odd-man rushes, fights, and play behind the net are sure to please the hockey-starved N64 user base.

O.D.T.

PUBLISHER: **Psygnosis**
DEVELOPER: **Psygnosis**
RELEASE DATE: **March 1999**

O.D.T., or *Or Die Trying*, is a third-person action/adventure in the style of *One* and *Tomb Raider* that plays like a cross between both. Combining action elements with exploration, players must manipulate their way through interconnecting, dungeonlike environments using one of four characters — wizard, female fighter, soldier, or mercenary.

QUAKE 2

PUBLISHER: **Activision**
DEVELOPER: **Aaron Seeler Pro.**
RELEASE DATE: **December 1998**

Aaron Seeler, the programmer behind Midway's port of *Quake* to Nintendo 64, is also responsible for *Quake 2*'s conversion to the console. Utilizing the same engine, *Quake 2* features a selection of the best levels from the PC release of the game, plus the obligitory four-player deathmatch mode.

Rush 2: Extreme Racing U.S.

Publisher: Midway
Developer: Atari Games
Release Date: November 1998

***Rush 2* utilizes the same game engine as the original, with emphasis on new, expanded tracks, a fresh selection of vehicles, and the ability to modify them. The game also employs an advanced stunts system, which awards players bonus points for jumps and tricks performed correctly. Visually there's not much difference from the original.**



Road Rash 64

Publisher: THQ
Developer: DT Productions
Release Date: Q3 1999

Recently formed Don Traeger Productions is taking a crack at N64 development with EA's hugely popular *Road Rash* franchise. THQ is publishing the game after a licensing deal with EA. The game, running on a polygonal 3D engine, will feature tracks and bikes designed exclusively for Nintendo 64. Hopefully, it'll avoid the problems that *Road Rash 3D* for PlayStation has.



RAYMAN 2

PUBLISHER: **Ubi Soft**
DEVELOPER: **Ubi Soft**
RELEASE DATE: **November 1998**

Rayman 2 for PC, now in full polygonal 3D, looks just as brilliant as its 2D predecessor. The game, like the original before it, features stylized characters with no joints and lush worlds to explore. Add formula platform gameplay, complemented by tight control, and you have a beautiful 3D upgrade to *Rayman*.

RE-VOLT

PUBLISHER: **Acclaim**
DEVELOPER: **Probe**
RELEASE DATE: **June 1999**

Re-Volt puts players in control of a plethora of radio-controlled vehicles, competing with others on tracks that range from living rooms to rooftops. Featuring accurate RC car physics, the racers tumble and flip just like in real life, while their flimsy antennas swing back and forth.

SOUTH PARK 64

PUBLISHER: **Acclaim**
DEVELOPER: **Iguana**
RELEASE DATE: **December 1998**

Believe it or not, "South Park" is coming to N64 as a first-person shooter. The game, being developed by Iguana, will use the famed *Turok 2* engine and will feature a four-player "battle" mode, in which players can fight it out using popular characters from the series.

SPACE STATION: SILICON VALLEY

PUBLISHER: **Take 2**
DEVELOPER: **DMA Design**
RELEASE DATE: **October 1998**

DMA Design's sick sense of humor is almost disguised by *Space Station*'s cute exterior, but not quite. Players control a robotic microchip named EVO, who can manipulate the bodies of dead animals. The game's graphics, despite the fact that it has been in development for nearly three years, are surprisingly well-done.

STARCRAFT 64

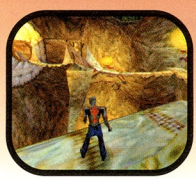
PUBLISHER: **Nintendo**
DEVELOPER: **Blizzard**
RELEASE DATE: **TBA 1999**

Nintendo snatched up the exclusive, worldwide publishing rights for Blizzard's hit. Although it is still unclear how the cobranded game will fit on cartridge and retain the original's visual punch, Blizzard is already promising exclusive characters and units not found in the PC version.

Shadow Man

Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Iguana U.K.
Release Date: Q1 1999

Another Acclaim comic book turned videogame, *Shadow Man* details the life of Michael LeRoi, a man who possesses the ability to travel between the land of the living and a darker, undead underworld. Hard at work on the game is Acclaim's technically adept Iguana U.K. team. *Shadow Man* is a moody, gory, and extraordinarily atmospheric 3D action/adventure with an over-the-shoulder view.



Space Circus

Publisher: Ocean
Developer: Infogrames
Release Date: Q3 1998

***Space Circus* pits players in the role of Starshot, a traveling performer for an intergalactic version of the "Greatest Show on Earth." The colorful 3D platformer enables complete freedom through a variety of cute worlds. The look and feel of the game is most decidedly French.**



SUPER MARIO 64 2

PUBLISHER: **Nintendo**
DEVELOPER: **EAD**
RELEASE DATE: **TBA 1999**

Rare has thrown down the gauntlet with *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Conker,* and Nintendo is ready for the challenge. Using a multicharacter engine (starring Luigi) and the latest in Nintendo technology, the sequel to N64's most successful platformer is sure to set new standards. A multiplayer mode is also planned.

THORNADO

PUBLISHER: **TBA**
DEVELOPER: **Factor 5**
RELEASE DATE: **TBA 1999**

After losing the publishing rights for its renowned *Turrican* shooters, Factor 5 is changing the name and design of its second N64 game to reflect the thunder and storm theme. Gameplay and play style is similar to those in *One,* but Factor 5 promises better camera angles and a co-op two-player mode.

TWELVE TALES: CONKER 64

PUBLISHER: **Rare**
DEVELOPER: **Rare**
RELEASE DATE: **October 1998**

Rare is at it again. The British developer's *Banjo* one-upper comes in the form of a squirrel named Conker. The game's 3D engine features lush graphics and surreal worlds like the ones that only Rare can do. *Conker's* added four-player battle mode and never-before-attempted two-player team mode make it one of Nintendo 64's most anticipated games.

TWISTED EDGE SNOWBOARDING

PUBLISHER: **Midway**
DEVELOPER: **Boss Game Studios**
RELEASE DATE: **September 1998**

Boss went back to the drawing board after Nintendo unveiled *1080° Snowboarding* to make the game as different as possible. Running on an improved *Top Gear Rally* engine, *Twisted Edge* emphasizes stunts and rewards players with speed boosts for well-executed moves.

V-RALLY '98: ARCADE CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION

PUBLISHER: **Ocean**
DEVELOPER: **Infogrames**
RELEASE DATE: **November 1998**

Infogrames is creating a custom version of the European best-seller for N64, complete with two-player, split-screen races and much-deserved control improvements. Races take place in varying weather conditions in countries all over the world, including France, England, Spain, Sweden, New Zealand, and Indonesia.

Star Wars: Rogue Squadron

Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: Factor 5/LucasArts
Release Date: November 1998

Using the programming talents of the Amiga veterans at Factor 5, LucasArts is taking the best of *Shadows of the Empire* — the Hoth level — and turning it into a game of its own. In the role of Luke Skywalker, players take on the Empire with a variety of planetary missiles in all the major ships from the movies. For more, see our LucasArts preview this issue (page 32).



Top Gear Overdrive

Publisher: Kemco
Developer: Snowblind
Release Date: November 1998

Made up of ex-members of Boss Game Studios, Snowblind is taking the graphics and physics of *Top Gear Rally* to a new level. Built entirely around dirty tricks like nitro boosts and defensive oil slicks, *Top Gear Overdrive* brings back the type of arcade gameplay that prevailed in the early days of the series.



WCW/NWO REVENGE

PUBLISHER: **THQ**
DEVELOPER: **Asmik**
RELEASE DATE: **September 1998**

Building on the success of last year's *WCW Vs. NWO: World Tour*, THQ's *Revenge* features more than 80 official wrestlers, improved AI, a four-player mode, and updated player profiles. The game's engine, while aging, may still have what it takes to satisfy the crowds.

WILD METAL COUNTRY

PUBLISHER: **Gremlin**
DEVELOPER: **DMA Design**
RELEASE DATE: **Q1 1999**

DMA Design is planning to port its multiplayer tank battle game for PC to N64 next year. Players take control of different types of tanks, from hulking Howitzers to exotic dual-prop hovertanks. In a twist on traditional capture the flag gameplay, the robotic tanks set out to steal their enemy's power cores and try to disrupt other machine civilizations.

WINBACK

PUBLISHER: **Koei**
DEVELOPER: **Koei**
RELEASE DATE: **Q1 1999**

With *Winback,* the makers of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* series are trying their luck with a compelling spy shooter. The game can't deny its inspiration — everything looks like and plays similarly to Konami's *Metal Gear Solid*, right down to the use of stealth over direct conflict.

WIPEOUT 64

PUBLISHER: **Psygnosis**
DEVELOPER: **Psygnosis**
RELEASE DATE: **December 1998**

Psygnosis turned heads at Sony when it announced its publishing plans for N64. *Wipeout,* inspired by Nintendo's own *F-Zero,* is all about wild track designs and neck-breaking speeds. The N64 update promises four-player, split-screen races, improved physics, more weapons, and all new tracks. The game has improved since we last covered it (**NG 44**), but since it is Psygnosis' debut project on a notoriously difficult system, the final quality is anyone's guess.

Turok 2: Seeds of Evil

Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Iguana
Release Date: October 1998

The sequel to the immensely successful Nintendo 64 shooter pits the Native American warrior against an army of aliens and dinosaur hybrids. Utilizing a better 3D engine, dynamic lighting effects, multiplayer modes, and soft-skinned characters, *Turok 2* will feature less fog and more balanced levels. It's by far one of the most anticipated titles for the system.



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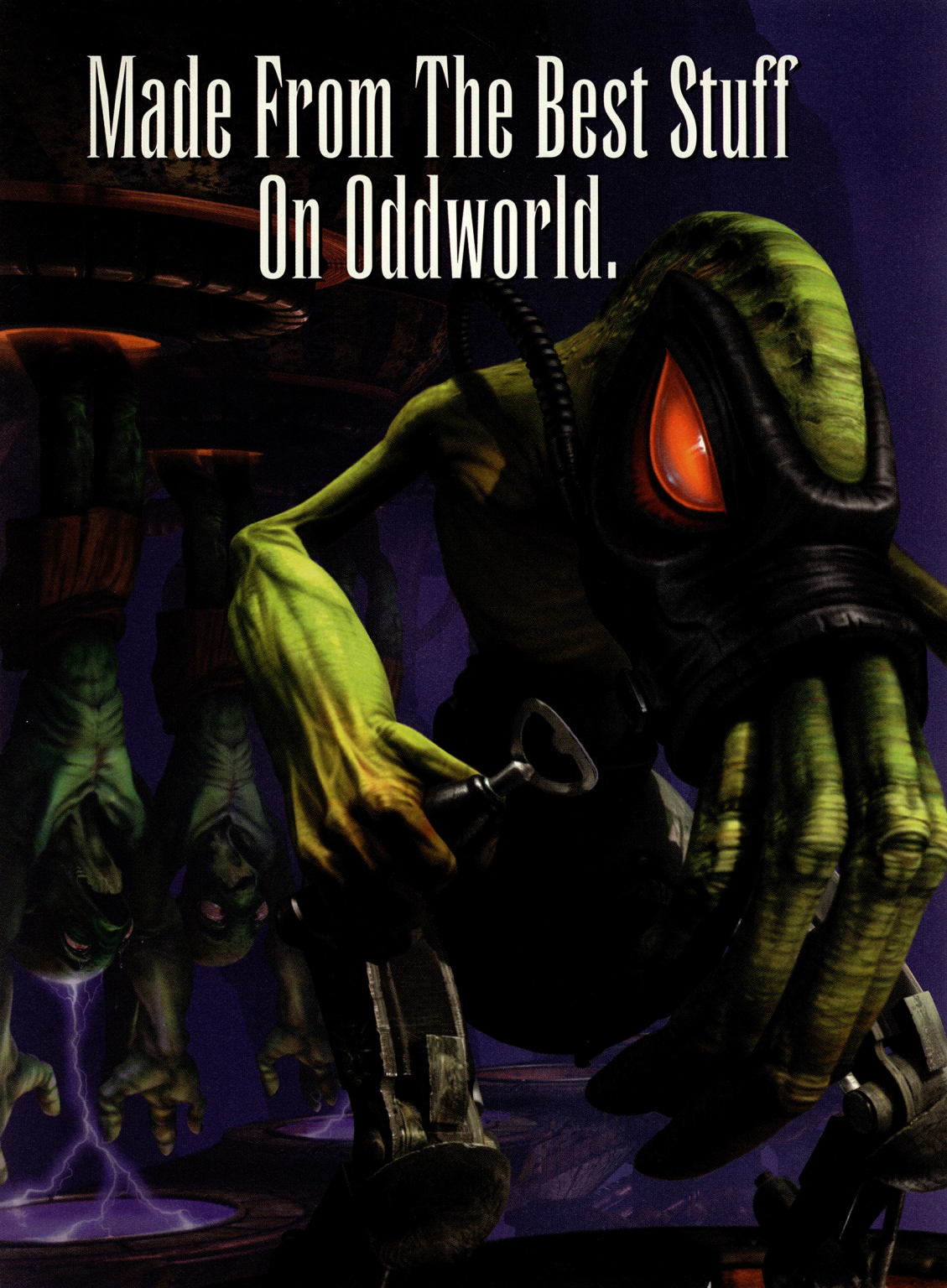
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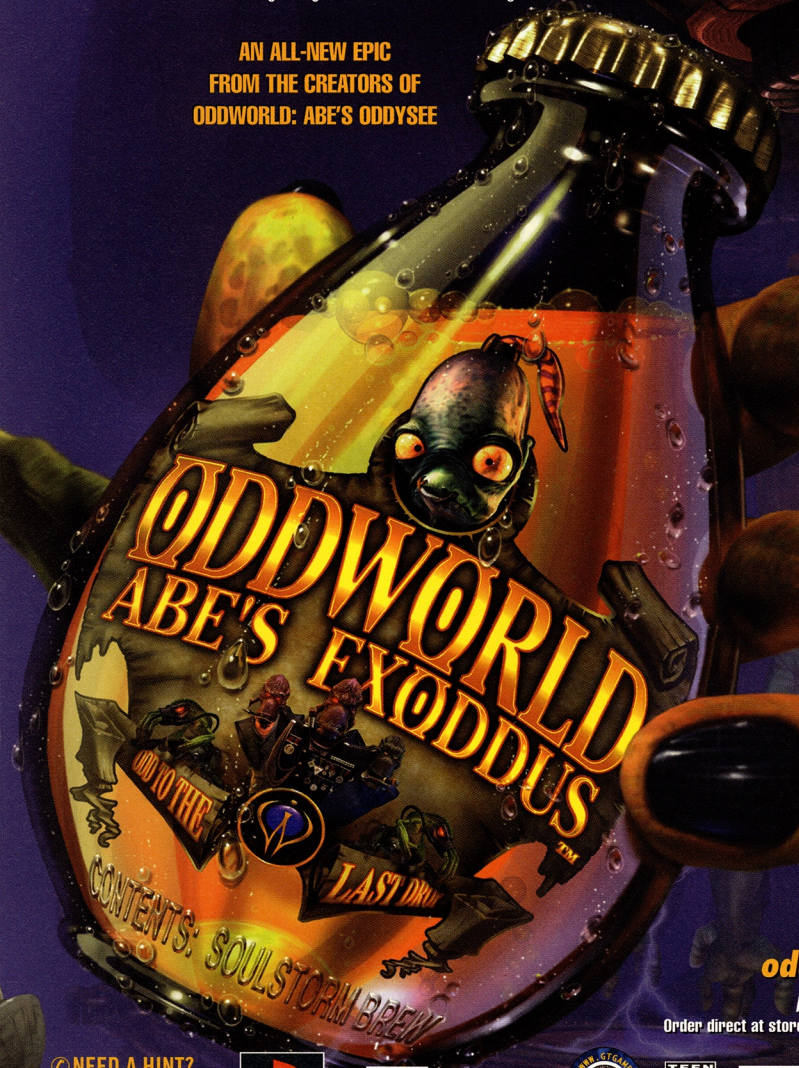

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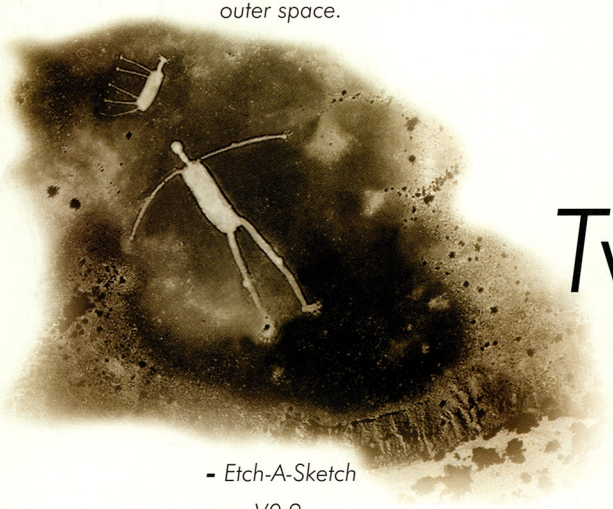
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CONFOUNDING
FACTOR

Create the videogaming icon of the decade. Walk away from a fortune in royalties. Develop the "game of the millennium." And then talk to **Next Generation**. The inevitable question ...

HOW DO YOU TOP LARA CROFT?

The phenomenon of '90s videogaming, *Tomb Raider* dominated every specialist magazine and every store window for months on end. It reaped huge rewards for Derby's Core Design, where the game was born. Such is Lara Croft's popularity that Sony paid handsomely to keep her away from Nintendo consoles until the end of this century. Lara's face is everywhere, from pop videos to the cover of lifestyle magazines. But behind every great woman is a great man. Or in this case, two.

After creating Lara, her fathers abandoned ship in February '97, leaving Core — and a not-inconsiderable amount of royalty payments — behind them. Although he surfaced briefly to comment on the *Tomb Raider* spectacle for *The Face* magazine, the lead artist on the game, the man responsible for Lara's gravity-defying breasts, all but disappeared. His name is Toby Gard. In equal partnership with Paul Douglas, *Tomb Raider*'s lead programmer, the pair has been busy setting up a new development studio, Confounding Factor.

Backed by Interplay and based in Bristol, in the southwest of England, the fledgling six-man team is hard at work, striving to create a title it confidently claims to be "the game of the millennium." It's a shock factor tactic, however, angled to draw attention from aspirational programming talent. "If you don't have high expectations of yourself and high goals, then there doesn't seem to be much point," explains Douglas. Both he and Gard are serious about what they do, as might be expected from two men who have walked away from the shelter of a successful company to start an independent endeavor. They are, however, clearly enjoying their freedom, and with their new title *Galleon,* they are on course to confound those skeptical about the company's credentials.

And so, settled within the spacious environs of Confounding Factor's ex-design studio offices, marred only by the dog-eared couch that defines the company's gameplaying area (which bears a surprising resemblance to **Next Generation**'s own game testing area), we set forth to uncover the story of Toby, Paul, and a girl named Lara ...

NG: A good place to start would seem to be your departure from Core Design. What was your impetus for leaving?

Toby Gard: It was just so we could expand and do something more. Core really got into the idea of the *Tomb Raider* franchise, and we wanted to go off and do something different. I suppose that was the main reason. Maybe a little bit of creative differences, but nothing major. We just wanted to branch out on our own.

NG: Was it a difficult decision to make?
Toby: There was a lot of money to be left behind, but we had to make that decision. It was a hard one, but I think we have made the right one — to go out and do our own thing.
Paul Douglas: At the end of the day we wanted to do games, not just sit there and rake in the cash. We were already getting bored of just sitting there for two months twiddling our thumbs. So as you can imagine, we were eager to get on and do something. It wasn't happening at Core.

NG: What was Core's reaction to you leaving?
Toby: They were very upset.
Paul: In fact, they stopped our money ... But maybe we shouldn't go into that.
Toby: Yeah, they weren't very happy.
Paul: They paid one month's royalties and then stopped the check at the very last second. It went into my bank and then came out again.

NG: Did you get any royalties at all, then?
Toby: While we were still there, yes.
Paul: Just not February's.

NG: Do you have any regrets about leaving, apart from the money?
Toby: Yeah, I think so. Some. There's lots of friends that have been left behind up there, a lot of social life we enjoyed.
Paul: Mainly the money, I think ...
Toby: Well, OK, that's Paul. I kind of liked the people as well. Derby wasn't particularly exciting. It was a good place to work, it was relaxed, and there was a good bunch of people.



Going underground

Confounding Factor is part of a mass of new, independent developers. Joining ex-Rareware staff (Eighth Wonder), famed videogame guru Peter Molyneux (Lionhead), and past members of Bullfrog (Mucky Foot), Gard and Douglas are part of a trend that is spreading. Creative individuals are beginning to tire of having to operate under the banner of a publisher, searching for both recognition and independence.

After a long stint in the limelight, the big companies are having to move over for brighter stars, newcomers intent on delivering maximum gameplay to the ever-expanding market. This pattern hasn't ended either, with new mutations arriving each month. Cooperative groupings of small developers are currently hot news, a trend embodied by Gathering of Developers (see Talking, **NG 41**). But do Gard and Douglas feel it was a coincidence that so many talented individuals decided to go it alone around the same time?

Toby: I think that it is going that way. Fragmenting down into small groups that are concentrating purely on trying to make good games. I think that it's a really positive way for the industry to move. They have no management coming down from above telling them what they're doing isn't going to be viable. The only thing they have to do is sell it to a publisher, and the publishers treat you with a lot more respect when you're a small company rather than just an employee.
Paul: I think it was just a consequence of all the big money coming into the game. That's obviously not gone down too well, forcing the "creatives versus accountants" sort of thing that's happening in a lot of the bigger companies.

NG: Does it feel as though you are part of a "movement"?
Toby: We don't really know any of the others. We consciously made a decision not to keep up with what was happening in the games industry, just to have a break from it all. It was quite good to get away because with the success of *Tomb Raider*, everyone was wanting to know what happened to us, so we just laid low and had a bit of a life.



NG: What would you say has been the greatest gain of striking out on your own?
Paul: It's just the freedom, I think.
Toby: We're paid a lot less here, and we are having to do a lot more work …
Paul: The environment is a lot more creative. People here are interested in what they are doing.
Toby: Not that they weren't at Core, you understand [laughs]. It's just the feeling of being somewhere that's …
Paul: … going somewhere.

NG: Did you have any problems finding a financial backer?
Paul: Not at all. We had a fairly good game under our belt so it was easy. I think a lot of other people have had problems. We were very lucky.

NG: You've chosen to start this new, independent life a long way from Derby. What brought you to Bristol?
Toby: Because there are lots of things to do, because there are places to go …
Paul: And because we thought Bristol deserved a major league developer [laughter all around].

Videogame piracy

It's in its infancy, with a release date cast out to the far side of the holidays, but Confounding Factor has a game. And it looks like it could be good. Very good, even. *Galleon* is a pirate adventure in which the player guides the (male) character Rhama around a series of islands. But thoughts of LucasArts' *Monkey Island* series should be banished; there are no wise-cracking skulls in *Galleon,* just vast environments set to be filled with testing conundrums. At the time of **Next Generation**'s visit, Rhama could be seen pounding through semi-textured landscapes, confirming that the animation, at the very least, will be top-notch.

Confounding Factor has a problem, though. Whether the public knows it or not at the moment, every videogame publication is going to be shouting about *Galleon*'s parentage. Lara Croft will cast a curvaceous shadow over proceedings, requiring Rhama to use every ounce of his muscular movement to outrun her.

NG: Do you think it will be difficult avoiding the *Tomb Raider* factor, in terms of press and public opinion?
Toby: I don't think we will, not when we start showing it around. We're not under the shadow of *Tomb Raider* really ▸



Although these are workstation renders, the polygon count is well within the means of PC 3D accelerators. The light is less so

Girl power

She's outlived the Spice Girls and retained an element of credibility despite her objectification by mainstream and specialist media alike. Amid the now-settling furor that engulfed Lara Croft, it has almost been forgotten what her character represented within the gaming world. Buxom babes have always been a factor in a market that caters almost exclusively to men, but none had ever combined brains with beauty. In hindsight it now seems an obvious move, although Gard claims that Core was reluctant to allow the development team to use a female character.

It's true that *Tomb Raider* would never have succeeded without Lara, but likewise, she would have faltered without a strong game to saunter through. Mainstays of that cavernous environment, Gard and Douglas still harbor strong feelings for the woman they had to share with the whole world.

NG: What are your views on the *Tomb Raider* series now?
Paul: It's good, but I think they need to really seriously consider its direction. I don't think they can constantly keep churning sequels on that engine. They should take Lara in different directions — whatever those directions are — I don't really want to give them any hints. They should really try and push her out into different genres. *Tomb Raider II* was quite fun …
Toby: Hard. Too hard.
Paul: And too much shooting of human bad guys.



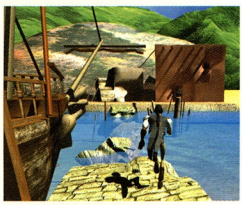
Confounding Factor, left to right: Andrew Howe (programmer), Kevin Pateman (programmer), Toby Gard (creative director), Matt Bell (3D artist), Paul Douglas (technical director)

NG: Do you think *Tomb Raider III* [announced at E3] is a step too far?
Paul: I think it's come out too quickly. They should have left it. This year we've had *Tomb Raider II*, and now the budget release of the first one, and then it's straight into *Tomb Raider III*. They should have waited a bit, got people really up for it, wanting it. But Eidos needs it. What triple-A releases has it got this Christmas?

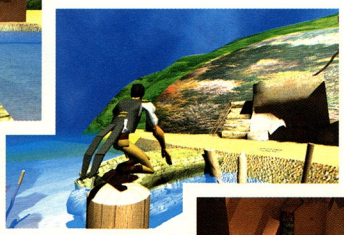
NG: You've been quoted in the past as saying that the game is always more important than the character. Do you think that's still true of *Tomb Raider*?
Toby: Well, I still think the character wouldn't have been anything had it not been a good game. I really do believe that. At the end of the day you can say that she had a lot of personality, but that came out through the game. She's quite attractive-looking, in a bizarrely formed way, but just that wouldn't do it. It needed a good game, and after that people could latch onto the character. Just like a film actor, you can like them, but they can still do a crap movie.

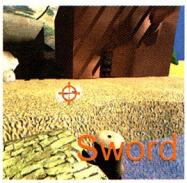
NG: Did the marketing of Lara and *Tomb Raider* ever get you down?
Toby: Yes, she was meant to be untouchable, to be this demure person — that was the whole concept, really. And so some of the more down-market marketing did get us down while we were still there. But now they can do what they like, it's theirs! But they did a good job at the end of the day, didn't they? Whether or not it was as sexist as some of the marketing is, is neither here nor there when you are talking about that sort of money, I suppose.





One of *Galleon*'s innovations is the ability of Rhama to lock onto objects, enabling him to run past, grab an item, and start using it in one smooth, single motion. The system is also used for combat, with the player guiding the character rather than the attacks — as in *Tomb Raider*. However, all weaponry will be blade- rather than barrel-based











Meet Rhama. He is gifted with a vast range of movement: running, climbing, swimming, and picking up objects smoothly

because nobody really knows about us — until this interview comes out. I don't think we'll have a problem with it because what we are doing now is much better than what we were doing at Core.

NG: You're developing only on PC at the moment. Given the supposed compatibility between the two platforms, is Dreamcast something you would be interested in?
Toby: There are discussions going on at the moment …
Paul: But if we do another platform, we will have to get a lot more people in, and we might start slipping our PC release date.
Toby: It's a bit up in the air really. We only spoke to Sega recently, but it's a really nice machine, obviously.

Future factors

Outside of the creative freedom that leaving Core Design has given Gard and Douglas, and beyond the evening-hour recreation on offer in Bristol, longer-term benefits are becoming tangible. Personal freedom has been a welcome facet ("to not have a bollocking if you come in at quarter after 10 instead of half past nine," grins Paul), as is being in control of their own destiny (although Gard says it's "scary as well"). There have been trade-offs, as Gard admits ("things took longer than we expected to set up and get done"), but overall Confounding Factor is engulfed in a positive atmosphere. Gazing into the future is often a fruitless occupation, but **Next Generation** was interested to find where the company's compass was pointed, aside from the short-term search for final staff members.



The guys at Confounding Factor aren't worried about living under the shadow of *Tomb Raider*. They're confident that what they're working on now is even better

NG: Would you like to see a situation where Confounding Factor was producing multiple products, or do you think you will always be a one-game company?
Paul: Eventually we'll move to two teams. I think from a technical aspect I'd like to get people working on pure R&D, which is something very few companies do. We can have a team that goes off and uses an engine that has really been pushed forward by others. While some people will just be working purely on technology, others might be working on the actual gameplay.

NG: On a personal level, what are your ambitions for Confounding Factor?
Paul: Get rich quick and retire [laughs].
Toby: I want a Ferrari for every toe I have … I think it would be great if everybody who came and worked for us could make a load of money and could all feel like they'd worked on something that was really cool. That we can have a really super-cool place that people want to come to. Where we can make really fab things and never compromise on quality, in the way that Molyneux does — which is why he's such a hero.

NG: You've said in the past that being a game designer is about as cool as working in a slaughterhouse. Do you feel like that situation is improving?
Toby: I doubt it somehow.
Paul: Who's defining cool? It's not really, though, is it?
Toby: I suppose it depends. The PlayStation is bringing it into a broader market. I don't think it will ever be cool. At least you can get accepted and not get quite as many funny looks from "normal" people these days. Most people go, "Oh really? That's nice."

NG: Is there any particular aspect of *Galleon* that you feel is breaking down expected boundaries?
Toby: There is an awful lot of things we are really expanding to break beyond the limits of anything else. There are so many "unique selling points," or whatever you call them in strange marketing terms. The fighting …
Paul: … the user interface, so that it can give a newcomer as much satisfaction as someone who has played it for hours. They can get into it in a couple of minutes — that's the most challenging thing. I think it is a really overlooked aspect of game programming in this 3D world. It's your user interface, much more than your cool graphics engine. *Tomb Raider* had a fair control system, but we're moving a lot further than that. That's my goal. NG



The attractive redhead is Faith. She plays "a major part in things," appearing at intervals through the game. Environments, which are still under construction, will also be interactive



These days, Confounding Factor is working on a pirate game called *Galleon*. However, the team is reluctant to release realtime images until later in its development. Given the current lack of texture maps, that's understandable

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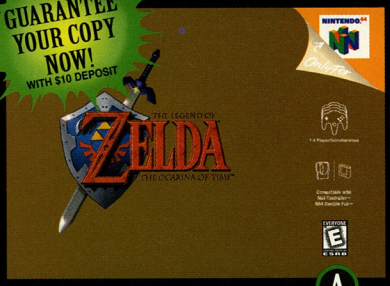
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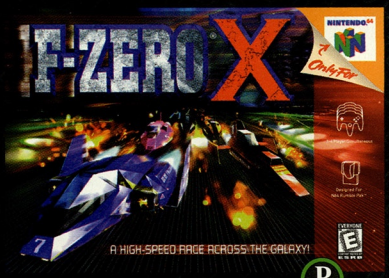
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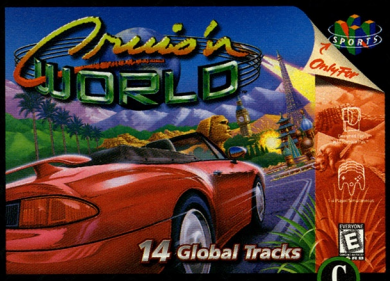
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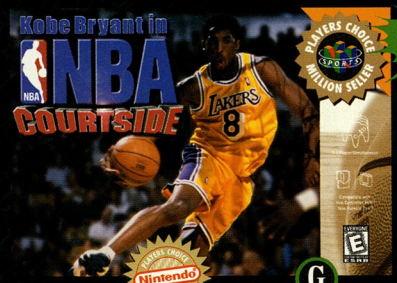
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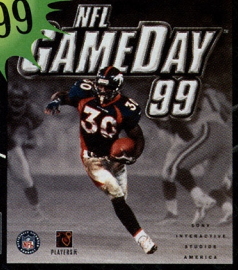
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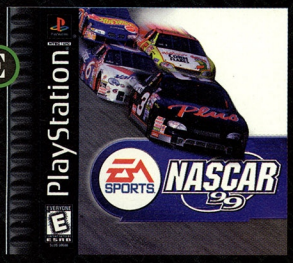
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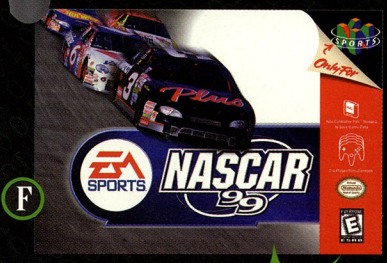


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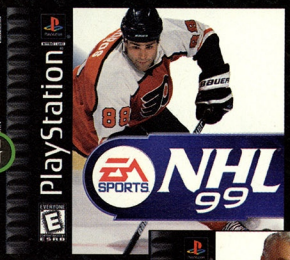


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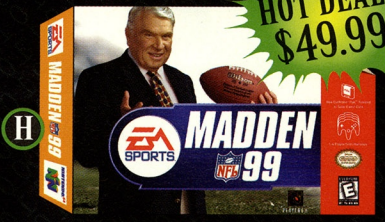
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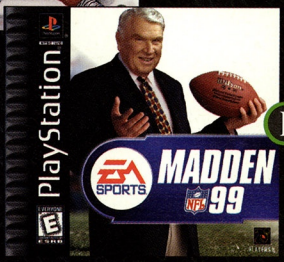
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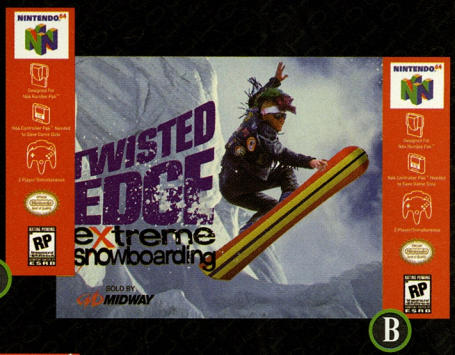
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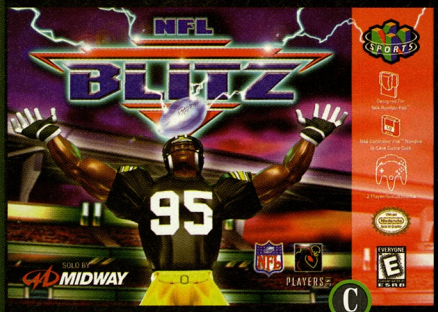
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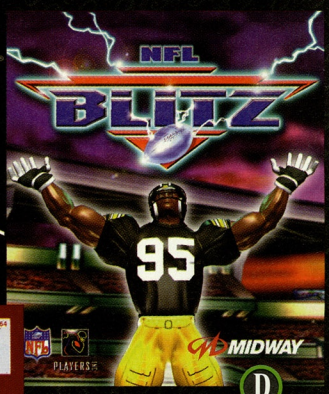
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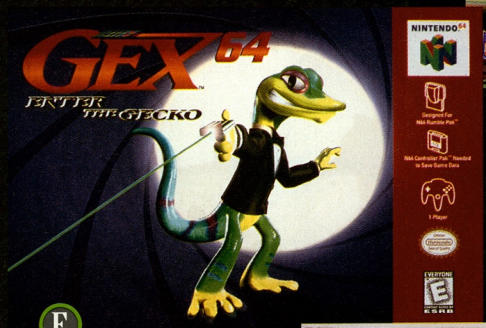
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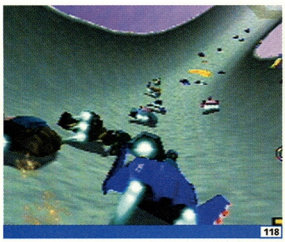
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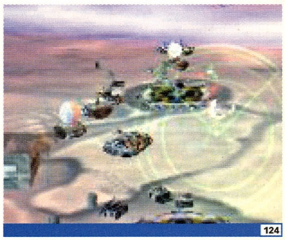
★★★
Good
A solid and competitive example of an established game style.

★★
Average
Perhaps competent — certainly uninspired.

★
Bad
Crucially flawed in design or application.

Denotes a review of a Japanese product.


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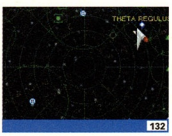

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More than **just another update** to a 16-bit classic, Nintendo's latest has to be **played to be believed**

F-ZERO X

Platform: **Nintendo 64**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Nintendo**





The newly added Death Race requires players to knock other racers off the track with the help of push and spin moves

When Nintendo launched N64 with *Super Mario 64* and *PilotWings 64*, the company effectively set the stage for a series of stunning updates to classic NES and Super NES games. Both titles managed to completely satisfy fans of the originals and at the same time attract a new, younger audience, with flashy graphics and involving gameplay.

But it didn't take long for the first chink to appear in the mighty N's armor. *Mario Kart 64*, while true to its predecessor in many respects, simply didn't raise the bar in any way, and lacked the balance and playability that most Nintendo titles are known for. Similarly, the recently released *Yoshi's Story* tried to continue the original's tried-and-true 2D gameplay — without a real understanding of what made *Yoshi's Island* great in the first place. If it wasn't for new franchises like *Wave Race* or *1080° Snowboarding*, it might seem that Nintendo had lost its magic.





Protective shields flare up at the press of a button to get the player's car out of harm's way

In comes *F-Zero X*, put together by a Japanese EAD team composed of several key *Wave Race* programmers. First screenshots of the game showed a bland, dated-looking sequel with very little visual punch, a virtual Xerox copy of the beloved Super NES racer. But in this case, looks are indeed deceiving. *F-Zero X* is no *Mario Kart 64*. Like *Wave Race* or Sony's *Gran Turismo*, the game stands out among other racers, with perfectly tuned controls and a number of innovations.

For starters, most third-party racers struggle to come up with five distinct tracks, while *F-Zero X* packs in more than 24 tracks and 30 cars, most of which are hidden and have to be earned first. When racing the first two tracks, the overall feel and experience are eerily similar to the original *F-Zero*. You compete with hovering cars, seemingly inspired by '60s art-deco appliances on floating tracks high up in the sky. You accelerate, you brake, you boost ahead of enemies and try not to hit the lethal track sides that deplete your energy.

But after the traditional "get used to the game, it's getting serious soon" stage, *F-Zero X* pulls out all the stops. Although visually similar to the Mode 7 *F-Zero*, the polygonal tracks in the new 64-bit version curve, twist, and curl in the third dimension and rush by at such intense speeds, it's easy to forgive the lack of trackside detail or backgrounds. There is, of course, a reason for the bland scenery and simple road graphics, and this time, it's not limited cartridge space. There are up to 30 cars on screen at the same time, racing along at a steady



When players get knocked out of multiplayer races early on, they can play slots and mess up the remaining racers' energy (left). Despite the high number of opponents, the computer drones behave intelligently and use shortcuts (above)

60 frames per second. That's 30 cars, all behaving differently, skidding into turns, bumping into each other, and boosting out of harm's way. The feel of hitting a "zipper" and jetting right through the middle of a pack of 15 cars is so electrifying that it takes a great deal of discipline not to purposely smash into everyone like an out-of-control cue ball. You really have to admire Nintendo's strict design policy and restraint in producing a title that looks visually dated in stills and only show its true qualities when in motion. It's almost as if Nintendo decided to extract the essence of racing — maximum speed and perfect control — and throw out anything that could stand in its way.

Extreme speeds can often negatively reflect on control and hamper gameplay, but *F-Zero X* avoids the pitfalls of *Extreme-G* or *Wipeout,* with dead-on control and collision physics. On top of that, the tracks are so well-designed that if players are good enough, they will be able to avoid every obstacle and never bump into a wall or fall off the track. However, the learning curve is steep, and even seasoned players will spend weeks perfecting their drift techniques and reaching the mysterious, hidden X Cup (which follows right after the mysterious, hidden Joker Cup). To leave the field open for the future, Nintendo even added "64DD hooks" that allow for add-on disks like track editors or course updates — assuming the ill-fated disk drive ever makes it out.

The control scheme accurately reflects Nintendo's mantra of delivering a game that beginners can enjoy but only experts can master. For example, many players will be content steering their craft left and right with the analog stick and braking for the tougher turns. But this won't get you far on the higher difficulty modes. Pressing the right shoulder button while turning right (or Z while turning left) will enable sharper turning. However, reversing this routine will produce drift turns, which, coupled with strategic boosts, will get you around corners without losing any momentum at all.



Despite specular highlighting and rounded tracks, the graphics look horribly dated in stills. But once you see the game in motion, all complaints about lack of detail are forgotten

In an interesting twist on the tire and fuel management of many sim racers, *F-Zero X* offers the choice of either preserving energy for the defensive shield or using it to boost ahead of the competition with the press of a button. Every lap, you can replenish energy reserves on the fly by driving over special energy fields that are strategically placed on every track.

Unlike its weapons-based brethren, *F-Zero X* relies on pure racing. There are no lock-on missiles or fancy gadgets to put yourself ahead of the competition. The only aggressive feature the N64 version adds to the franchise is the ability to knock other racers off the track by smashing into them or draining their energy by pulling off a new spin move. To fully exploit this, the team even added the Death Race mode, an elimination race where players have to knock out all other racers as quickly as possible. On the multiplayer front, *F-Zero X* offers four-player, head-to-head races at 60fps, with an innovative "slot machine" feature. If the option is switched on, players knocked out of the race early on can mess up the other drivers' energy by playing slots.

If there is one complaint we have with the game, it's the lack of a multiplayer GP mode. But since most other racers can't even manage to come up with a smooth two-player Vs. race, this is really a moot point. Otherwise, *F-Zero X* impresses on all levels. From the rocking guitar tunes (courtesy of the same composer who created the original's music) to the insanely addictive Grand Prix races, the game is a blast.

Rating: ★★★★★



Next to banked curves and overpasses, *F-Zero*'s tracks contain loops, corkscrews, jumps, mines, tunnels, and pipes

rating

FASA's attempt at **realtime strategy** is a pretty **mediocre game**

MECHCOMMANDER

Platform: **PC**
Publisher: **MicroProse**
Developer: **FASA Inter.**

For the most part, FASA Interactive took the safe bet by converting its wildly popular *Battletech* series to the realtime format for its first product. However, it also managed to add a couple of twists to the standard formula that make the game unique.

The first significant twist is, naturally enough, that it's set in the *Battletech* universe. This alone gives the game an immediate familiarity with the thousands of fans of both the pen-and-paper strategy game and the ultra popular *MechWarrior* series. The second twist is that the gameplay is much more centered on the tactical strategy used on the battlefield than on the traditional RTS system of resource management. In fact, all resource management happens before each battle, as you must purchase and load out your mechs, assign them pilots, and customize their squads. Knowing your mechs is very important here, as it is essential to have the right mechs for the right missions.

Luckily the developers provided a hefty tome that thoroughly tells you anything you might need to know about the game. In fact, unless you're a *Battletech* god, you pretty much have to read the manual because the game already assumes a familiarity with the intricacies of both the interface and the mechs. And, unfortunately, there's absolutely no in-game tutorial to help with the steep learning curve.





Unfortunately, to really enjoy the graphics, you need to use the zoomed-in view, which is inappropriate for tactical strategy







Despite the sprite-based graphics, the effects are still really well-done

After getting through the prebattle logistics, you're ready to step into the shoes of the commander and guide your units around the battlefield. Sadly, this is where the game stumbles. Since this is in real time as opposed to being turn-based like the pen-and-paper game, much of the micromanagement has been turned over to the AI — purists will likely be offended that details like weapon and heat management are totally disregarded.

Another big gripe is that there is no partial victory in *MechCommander* — either you win a mission or you lose, thus ending the game. The problem is that missing even one mission objective counts as failure. There are times when computer-scripted opponents appear and knock off a target that was previously thought safe. Oh well, time to try again.

Although there are plenty of different ways to beat some missions, finding them through trial and error instead of tactical skill becomes a bit frustrating and turns each mission into more of a puzzle than a real tactical challenge. Most of your time will be spent in the loadout screens trying to figure out what the best combination of mechs will be to get through the latest round of enemy scripting.

Graphically the game holds up fairly well. The sprites are all very well-detailed, although neither of the two camera modes is perfect. One is too close, the other too far away. The mechs themselves are extremely detailed but move just a bit too gracefully, never really giving you the feel of piloting a 25-plus-ton robot.

Overall, this is a good first effort, and FASA is to be commended for trying something different in the overcrowded field of RTS games. Unfortunately, it lacks polish, and the repetition of each mission drags down the fun factor.

Rating: ★★★

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Sega manages a fine yet **belated closing** to its 32-bit era

SHINING FORCE III

Platform: **Saturn**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Camelot Software Planning**

No one doubts Sega's decision to pave the road to Dreamcast with the dead cases of Saturns, but with titles like *Shining Force III*, one can't help but wish Sega had tried (to bastardize Dylan Thomas) raging against the dying light and pushing the system's life span just a little longer.

In years to come, the memory of Saturn's last RPG will probably be comparable to Plato's conception of Atlantis — *Shining Force III* is a game arguably more advanced than any other title in the genre on the market today, riding the leading edge of role-playing technology. Unlike *Final Fantasy VII* or *Dark Savior*, it uses its 3D engine to create towns and landscapes, which are functional and realistic. Players can actually explore them without running into the frustrating barriers of prerendered backgrounds or gratuitous 3D design. Seeing the floating city of Saraband for the first time is like giving sight to the blind: Players can peek through corners, look under bridges, and see all four sides of a house — all the things that were previously impossible in traditional bitmap RPGs.

Camelot has also designed the most robust combat system this side of Konami's *Vandal Hearts*. The *Shining* series has traditionally emphasized the martial side of role-playing, and using its new 3D environment, players can go where no one has gone before. Elevation is crucial, affecting movement and damage almost as much as weapon terrain type. Raining arrows down on enemies from a cliff face will do more damage than it would from flat elevation, much like in real life. Moving across a hill looks like crossing an actual hill rather than a strangely painted surface. Navigation uses one of the most intuitive interfaces ever, and combat takes place in polygonal cut scenes that require almost no load time. They also possess a simple grace that Square tends to sacrifice in its *Final Fantasy* series for spectacle.

Unfortunately, despite its advancements, *Shining Force III* starkly delineates the shortcomings of Saturn's hardware and Sega of America's waning effort. Although the towns are fairly large and detailed, players looking past the fast frame rate will almost see the emperor's clothing. Despite a smart collection of texture maps, the game looks like a village full of Lego blocks dressed in highly elaborate wallpaper compared to GameArts' *Grandia*. Trading in detail for speed is a wise choice, but it doesn't help against PlayStation showcases like *Final Fantasy VII* or the upcoming *Xenogears*. Similarly, Sega of America has gone with the same horrendous voice acting talent that nearly destroyed *Christmas Nights*, and almost drains the excitement from the combat sequences.

Despite these flaws, as the last game for the American Saturn, this RPG is compelling enough to keep the last die-hard fans happy and waiting for Dreamcast. Like Saturn itself, *Shining Force III* will end up being an effort that was underproduced, underrated, but fun as hell.

Rating: ★★★★







The polygonal environments, while better than *Azure Dreams'*, still don't match up to *Grandia's*





While full of character, the models themselves are fairly rudimentary — still, it brings the series into 3D in a satisfying way

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The action **never stops** in Rage's newest **arcade-style shooter**

INCOMING

Platform: **PC**
Publisher: **Rage Software**
Developer: **Rage Software**



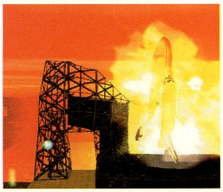
The strategy mode shows the versatility of the game's engine







From smoke trailing a missile to the bright colored lighting of explosions, *Incoming*'s graphics are among the best in today's 3D/action market



A major problem for action games in the 3D market today is the repetitive nature of their gameplay. All too often, a game that may at first be entertaining becomes redundant and boring after the same exciting actions and lighting effects are seen again and again and again and again. *Incoming*, Rage Software's newest arcade-style title, attempts to solve the problem.

While *Incoming* uses the tired, trite, protect-the-world-from-aliens, *ID4*-style plot, it does do a good job of keeping the arcade-style gameplay new and original by providing three different game modes, four types of available units, and six different scenarios, as players wage war against incoming aliens over land, sea, and air. Players can choose the Campaign Action mode, the standard game mode; Campaign Tactics, similar to the Action mode except it incorporates an overhead, realtime strategy-style scenario, where players must direct their units to destroy the enemy; and an Arcade mode, which gives the option to play any unit in any scenario. Throughout each scenario, players control four types of crafts: space, airborne, defense, and surface, all with unique controls and weapons.

Incoming has long been used as a 3Dfx demo, and not surprisingly, requires 3D acceleration. Rolling landscapes, detailed units, shockwaves, lens flare, and a barrage of colored lighting are just a few examples of the amazing graphics — easily among the best in today's market. Also, while the realtime scenario in Campaign Tactics is extremely basic and simple, it does make good use of the same engine with an overhead camera.

Like many arcade titles, *Incoming* has slight drawbacks when it comes to the PC market. Story and plot are almost nonexistent, other than a simple, basic briefing at the onset of each mission. In addition, the game is very simple: Kill every enemy in sight. No puzzles to solve, no strategy needed, just nonstop destruction.

Overall, *Incoming* is definitely an improvement to the action/arcade genre, as well as a visual improvement to the 3D market as a whole. The amount of varied units and different settings give *Incoming* the commendable originality and replay value that make it a title worth checking out.

Rating: ★★★★

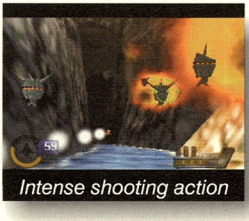


Players will soon find themselves battling hostile aliens over land, sea, and air, with all the flash that 3Dfx can provide

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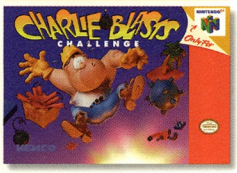
Gigantic animated bosses

KNIFE EDGE: *Nose Gunner*

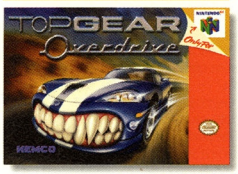
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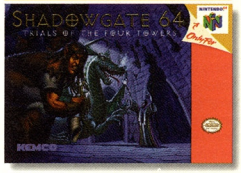
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MORTAL KOMBAT 4

Platform: PlayStation
Publisher: Midway
Developer: Eurocom

When *Mortal Kombat* hit arcades in '92, it was original and fresh. A lot has changed since, but unfortunately, *Mortal Kombat* hasn't. In its favor, *MK4* finally abandons the series' venerable (read: tired) sprite-based fighting engine for a much cleaner-looking and -playing polygonal one, but it just isn't enough.

Despite being arguably the best-playing *Mortal Kombat* yet, there isn't much here that's new or different enough to justify its existence. The fighting engine is a hybrid of the "juggle combo mania" in *MK2* and the "auto dial-a-kombo" that pervaded all of the variants of *MK3*. The addition of 3D movement and weapons livens up the mix, but it still plays about the same. Also, there are a few new characters, but the rest are just retreads of the past. True, every series reuses characters, but Midway could have at least created some new moves or techniques — the old characters even have the same fatalities.

The PlayStation version adds prerendered cinemas for each character's ending, but they're pathetic compared to the competition. Haven't these people seen the *Tekken* series or *Resident Evil 2*?

Overall, *MK4* is by no means incompetent, and it's a fine port of the arcade game. Had it not been released on a system teeming with great fighting games, it might stand a chance, but on PlayStation, there's little to distinguish it.

Rating: ★★



Of course there are plenty of ultra-bloody fatalities, but you've seen nearly all of them in previous *Mortal Kombat* games

MLB '99

Platform: PlayStation
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Sony







Action is fluid in *MLB '99*, with realistic movements and occasional collisions between players. It's a definite improvement for the series

One of the pleasant problems with PlayStation baseball is that there are so many games. So how does a player decide which is best? Here's a partial answer: Sony's *MLB '99*. Not only is it pleasing to the eye, but it also has a complex control system that enables players to do many things that other baseball packages don't.

Hitting is more difficult than in many other console baseball titles. Instead of just swinging to meet the ball, *MLB '99* requires the player to predict the type and zone of each pitch before swinging. Pitching is likewise complicated. Players select the pitch and the location, then control speed by how long they hold down the pitch button. Realistically, repeated fastballs sap the energy of the pitcher. Defense is also more intricate than casual players might be used to, but the system enables tight control over almost every fielder's move.

There are lots of gaming options — spring training, exhibition, regular season, and play-offs. The ballplayers are nicely rendered, the ballparks are well-detailed, and the voice of Vin Scully doing play-by-play is a definite plus. Even the ambient sounds are cool, as hawkers call out, "Nachos. Get your nachos."

Still, control is the key to realism, and here, a positive can also be a negative, depending on the proficiency of the gamer. For neophytes and casual players, such a complex control scheme may seem more like work than fun. Skilled players, however, will rise to the challenge and welcome the flexibility.

Rating: ★★★★

VR BASEBALL '99

Platform: PlayStation
Publisher: VR Sports
Developer: VR Sports

VR Baseball '99 is the second generation for the series and features some noticeable improvements over the original. The AI is smarter (more foul balls and fewer home runs), and the graphics are easier on the eye. It's also a kick to play.

The graphics aren't perfect, though. The color palette is on the dry side, and some ballplayers are too blocky, with muscles like gnarled tree trunks, but they still move realistically. Add the ambient sounds and you begin to feel as if you're in an actual ballpark. There's no color commentary here, just crowd noises and infield chatter, plus a PA announcer who introduces batters and a dedicated umpire who wrings emotion out of each call.

The pitching and batting controls are fairly uncomplicated. Pitchers select speed and direction, but it's hard to see the differences. Batters merely time their swings to connect. Such simple interfaces may disappoint some gamers.

There are three modes of play: exhibition games, a home run derby against stars from both leagues (including Mark McGwire), and regular seasonal play, in which you have a choice of 20, 40, 86, or a full season of 162 games.

Is it worth a buck? Yes. It may not be as complex as *MLB '99*, but *VR Baseball* will provide several hours of simple, clean, baseball pleasure.

Rating: ★★★

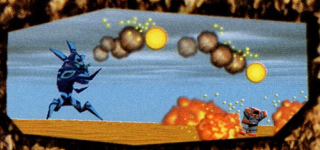






***VR Baseball*'s "smart camera" usually picks the best angles for gameplay — which still doesn't make it terribly exciting**

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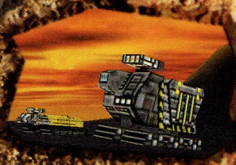





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NFL XTREME

Platform: PlayStation
Publisher: 989 Sports
Developer: SISA





***NFL Xtreme* would like to have the speed and punch of *NFL Blitz*, but it never works up the pace**

NFL Xtreme is Sony's answer to Williams' *NFL Blitz* (which was itself football's answer to *NBA Jam*) — no refs or rules, just action. And it delivered action, that would have been fine.

At least the game's heart is in the right place. Like *Blitz*, *NFL Xtreme* removes the intricacies of football and places the game on an arcade level, so anybody can just sit down with it and play. There are no rules, tackles are as much for showing off as they are for stopping the ball, and trash talk is a regular part of the game — although it seems as though *NFL Xtreme* has a vocabulary of about five phrases.

Visually, *NFL Xtreme* is actually a step up from *GameDay*. Since the teams have only five members each, players are large and easy to see, which in turn makes it that much easier to maneuver down the field.

The problem with *Xtreme*, though, is that it's anything but extreme. To begin with, it's slow — the players move as though they're running through molasses. The tackle animations are suitably exaggerated, but the pace makes them decidedly less than bone-crunching. Also, there's a lot of waiting around in between plays, and there's no four-player support, which sort of limits how "extreme" the action can get in front of the TV set.

Put simply, *NFL Xtreme* is no *NFL Blitz*. *NFL Mel-O* would have been a more apt title.

Rating: ★★

G DARIUS

Platform: PlayStation
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Taito

The original *Darius* coin-op was innovative in that it featured three screens, synchronized to provide the player with the longest horizontally scrolling shooter ever made. The length was about the only truly great feature at the time. Since then, the *Darius* games have matured into polished and enjoyable shoot-'em-ups.

The limited nature of scrolling blasters is not something that the PlayStation hardware can really address, but the polygonal graphics are very pretty when not obscured by explosions and laser fire. The gameplay is almost retarded — fly right, shoot everything, collect weapons. The Darius Boss Creatures are the most original feature here, and they're mostly fish — the terror-inspiring Tripod Sardine, for example.

This game is targeted at an ever-shrinking and ever-aging segment of gamers — those who remember Gradius, R-Type, and their ilk, and remember them fondly. *G Darius* is fun for those fogies who can stomach it, but the average gamer will be bored to death.

Rating: ★★★





If you ever wanted to fly through the air shooting cybernetic fish, *G Darius* is your chance

ROAD RASH 3D

Platform: PlayStation
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Electronic Arts

The *Road Rash* series has been around since the 16-bit era, but sadly, the Genesis version is still the best.

Road Rash 3D may give the series a visual update, but its gameplay just doesn't cut it. The "hook" behind *Road Rash* has always been the on-track fighting. Cracking opponents across the helmet with a length of chain was as legit a strategy as holding tight in the curves. But in *Road Rash 3D*, it's simpler to avoid the computer players than to fight them because of the horrendous lag between hitting the button and the actual motion. It's quite common to press the attack button and be well past an opponent before the animation cycles.

Other problems include spotty collision detection and a nasty habit of switching to a rear view mode at seemingly random times when using the analog controller.

This isn't to say that *Road Rash 3D* is all bad. Track design is decent, and controlling the bike is exceptionally easy when using an analog controller. Ultimately, however, the flaws are too glaring. Even long-time *Road Rash* fans will prefer being dragged behind a Harley over broken glass to throwing this disc in their PlayStation.

Rating: ★★



Fighting in *Road Rash 3D* is pointless. If you must play this game, use the analog controller to make banking around turns much easier

THUNDERFORCE V

Platform: PlayStation
Publisher: Working Design/Spaz
Developer: Technosoft





***Thunderforce V* isn't the worst game ever made, it just plays that way**

Oh dear. When *Thunderforce* first debuted on Genesis 500 years ago, it was a technical marvel, an excellent example of design, and a leader in play mechanics. Now it's showing its age in both concept and style.

Having reached number five in the series without a single innovation, *Thunderforce* seems to have run out of what little steam it had. The graphics are a combination of bland and appalling, in varying degrees. The backgrounds are atrocious, relying on simple polygonal planes and terrible parallax effects.

Gameplay is beyond idiotic, but at least it is difficult. If there is a saving grace here, then it is this: *Thunderforce* takes you back to a time when games weren't as good as they are now.

Rating: ★★

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WARGAMES: DEFCON 1

Platform: **PlayStation**
Publisher: **MGM Interactive**
Developer: **Interactive Studios Ltd.**

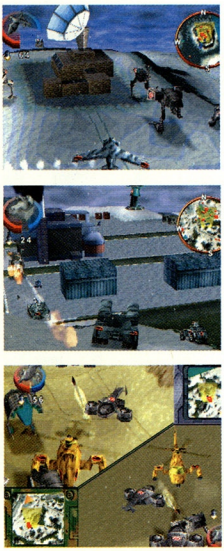
Picking up where the Matthew Broderick movie left off (sort of), *WarGames* is set in the near future. The WOPR defense computer has created its own army in a quest to wipe out humanity, and a battle for survival ensues, as NATO forces attempt to destroy WOPR and save the human race.

By far the game's biggest strength is the speed at which it takes place — this is no laid-back strategy game. Decisions must be made quickly and without hesitation. There is no resource management to worry about, as the game focuses entirely on the battle. While this may turn away some of the more hardcore strategy buffs, it makes the game much more appealing to the average player, and suits the console audience.

The game's most severe weakness is the computer AI. The computer-controlled opponents can put up a decent fight, but average players should be able to complete most levels on the first try, and a determined player could finish the entire game in a weekend. Replay value is also on the low side because the missions are always pretty much the same.

In the end, *Defcon 1* is a fun romp that is, unfortunately, a bit on the short side. A two-player combat option alleviates this problem somewhat. The bottom line? If you have a second player handy, get it. If not, rent it — it makes for a good three-day weekend of fun.

Rating: ★★★



***WarGames: Defcon 1* features both ground and air troops. The varying terrain levels can be used to your advantage, which is different for a console RTS**

DOMINION: STORM OVER GIFT 3

Platform: **PC**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Ion Storm**

It seems every publisher has to have at least one realtime strategy title. *Dominion: Storm Over Gift 3* marks off that quota for Eidos, but that's all it does. This is the most underwhelming take on the genre yet. Following the stock formula — harvest resources, build fortress, stockpile troops, attack enemy, repeat — *Dominion* follows a (surprise!) science fiction scenario.

The problem is obvious: *Dominion* is as flat-out generic as they come. The four available alien races don't have any true differences in abilities, and the graphics engine, an obvious clone of sprite-and-tile classics like *Command & Conquer* and *WarCraft*, just doesn't fly in the era of 3D designs like *Total Annihilation*. One could overlook this if the gameplay was something special, but alas, it's nothing more than a clone of a classic, without the needed polish.

Even the multiplayer mode, where sometimes even the lamest games can earn respect, can't compare to any other previous game. *Dominion* lacks play balance, and the network scenarios usually boil down to the dull, who-can-build-their-army-the-fastest race.

Worst of all, this is from Ion Storm — with all the hype surrounding that studio, you'd figure its first release would offer something new or at least interesting. As it is, *Dominion* should have shipped in a plain white box with "Realtime Strategy Game" stamped on it.

Rating: ★★





***Dominion* does little besides provide fuel for the cynical**

CASTROL HONDA SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

Platform: **PC**
Publisher: **Intense Simulation**
Developer: **Interactive Entertainment**

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then Sega should be thrilled that the folks at Intense Simulation liked *Manx TT* so much that they made their own Superbike game. Unfortunately, *Castrol Honda Superbike World Championships* lacks what made *Manx TT* a hit — speed and control.

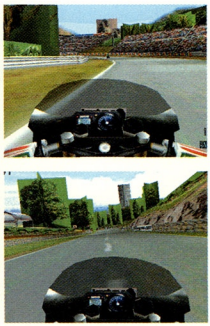
Superbike World Championships more or less requires a 3D accelerator, unless you want to play it in a butt-ugly, low-res software mode. Even with an accelerator, *Superbike* lacks any sense of speed, and weird artifacts appear when running the game on certain 3D cards.

The default controller layout for *Superbike* has the acceleration and braking functions tied to the up and down positions on the joystick. As anyone who's ever tried to use a setup like this can tell you, it isn't very conducive to racing. Thing is, remapping the joystick buttons just doesn't work. The game will accept the changes, but it won't register any of them. Try as we might, nothing except the default layout would work.

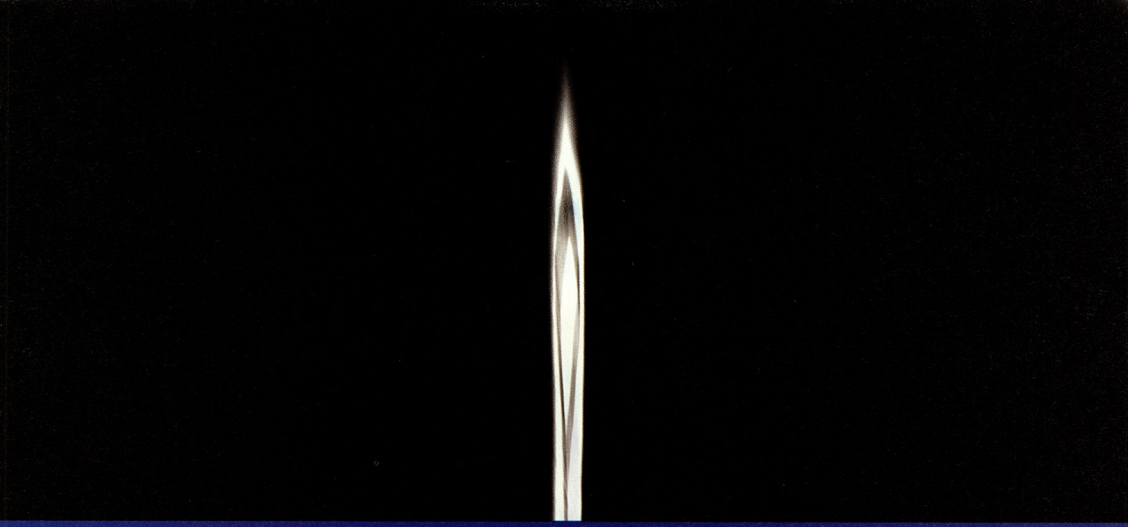
With detailed realism settings, *Superbike World Championships* had the potential to be a top-notch racing simulation. Instead, it's just another racing has-been. Check the bargain bins for a PC copy of *Manx TT* — it's cheaper and a lot more fun.

Rating: ★





***Superbike* looks decent but suffers from polygon artifacts around the trees — that, and an utter lack of concern for gameplay**



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EXTREME TACTICS

Platform: **PC**
Publisher: **Piranha Interactive**
Developer: **Media Station**



***Extreme Tactics* offers missions, campaigns, or skirmishes for one player and network games for up to four players**

To succeed in the crowded field of realtime strategy games, a title has to offer something new and different, and at first glance, *Extreme Tactics* seems like same-old same-old. The story is familiar: Two warring clans on a dying planet fight over dwindling resources for survival. One clan, the Hammerhawk, wants to use the remaining crystals to build a space fleet and search for a new, more viable home planet. The other clan, the Bloodfox, would rather use the crystals to extend the comforts of home. They're willing to kill each other over this difference of opinion.

But there is a fresh approach. This two-CD set (one for each clan) enables players to design their own forces from the ground up. Accessing the design center allows players to select from five basic chassis, pick a mode of transport for each (wheels, treads, hoverers, walkers, or flyers), then choose from several types of exotic weapons. The fun is in building a force of fighting machines that work well together.

Graphics are good, controls are fair. Music and sound effects are excellent. Battles between clan vehicles are lively. Is the game truly unique? Not really. Is it fun to play and strangely addictive? Yes. It may not be all that different, but it will keep you entertained for hours.

Rating: ★★★

PANZER COMMANDER

Platform: **PC**
Publisher: **SSI**
Developer: **Ultimation**

The massive World War II tank battles between Nazis and Allied troops have been popular in bookstores and movie houses for more than 50 years. Now those battles are coming to the computer screen in a big way.

At least three WWII tank sims (all with "Panzer" in the title) are due out this year. Perhaps the best is Strategic Simulations' *Panzer Commander*, with its grisly, battle-realistic tank campaigns.

Visually, *Panzer Commander* is a treat. Not only do tanks leave tread marks over a handsome variety of terrains and under a number of peculiar weather conditions, but also enemy vehicles and structures collapse so well when under fire that you are tempted to blast every farmhouse and barn, just to see them fall.

The game offers 40 missions that can be fought in the tanks of four countries. All the classic armor is here, from Nazi Tigers and Panthers to Russian T-34s, American Shermans, and British Cromwells. They lurch and clank realistically. Enemy machine guns clatter against the turret. Artillery chews up the ground.

Battles can be tracked from eight positions, including a chase view and seven tank views. Perhaps the most challenging is the gunner's view. It's hard to hit an enemy tank on the move, but if you stop to aim, you're a sitting duck.

It's good-looking and historically accurate, and it controls well. What more could any tank fan ask for?

Rating: ★★★★



The view from the gunner's window as an enemy tank is engaged at extremely close quarters (above). Air attacks come swiftly in *Panzer Commander*, often with deadly effect (left)

X-COM INTERCEPTOR

Platform: **PC**
Publisher: **MicroProse**
Developer: **MicroProse**

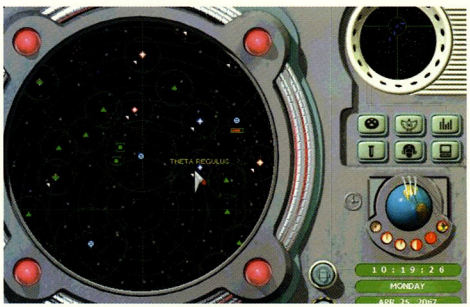
If Tim Burton designed a space combat sim, it would probably turn out like *X-Com Interceptor*. Everything, from the opening sequence, which is strangely reminiscent of *Mars Attacks*, to the in-game menus is loaded with camp value, and the game is all the better for it. It isn't often that you see a game with character.

Interceptor actually mixes strategy elements with space combat, but the combat sequences are fairly basic, and most missions only require the destruction of a number of alien craft. The real meat of the game is in the strategy — micromanagers rejoice, since every detail of the defense effort has to be looked after, right down to soldiers' salaries.

In the end, however, *Interceptor* is a lot like the original *X-Com*. Take away the first-person space combat, change a few locales, move the story back a bit, and *Interceptor* might as well be *X-Com*. While this doesn't make it a bad game, it doesn't make it anything special either.

The space combat engine works within the context of the game, but it isn't strong enough to stand on its own. *Interceptor* is a painless way to pass the time, but aside from a good sense of camp, it fails to bring anything new to the *X-Com* series.

Rating: ★★★



***Interceptor*'s space combat works within the context of a larger game, but it isn't good enough to stand on its own**

Choose your Master Monster summon your

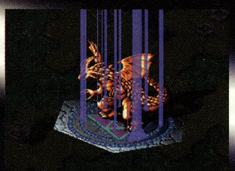
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VANGERS

Platform: **PC**
Publisher: **Buka Entertainment**
Developer: **Interactive Magic**

If there was ever a game that was a challenge to describe, it would be *Vangers*. The developers must have had a field day with the game's surrounding story line, scripting something so complex that it's impossible to condense into a few words — so we won't try.

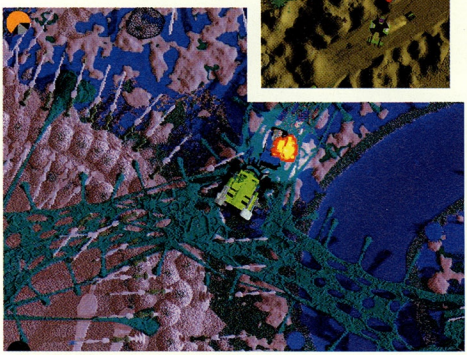
This auto-combat game wouldn't be so bad if it didn't suffocate under the plot. The overhead perspective and action are very similar to *Micromachines*, but with a more involved graphics engine and physics model. Players travel from place to place over the unforgiving terrain, fending off enemy vehicles and trading elements for funds that can be used for even more firepower.

Unfortunately, every destination reveals another segment of the novel that breaks up the action, all while the story unfolds in simple, unexciting text boxes. We hate to say it, but this is one instance we wished for FMV. It's a well-written and humorous tale, but for this type of game, wading through all that text milks the fun out of it.



It's a shame there wasn't a quick-action mode to simply jump in and enjoy the game because what fun there is to be had is buried deep within the pages of a convoluted science-fiction script. Sorry, folks, being weird doesn't always work. Still, if you like the story and don't mind reading a lot of text, there is a fun game here.

Rating: ★★★



***Vangers* isn't a bad game — if you don't mind reading for a few hours between stages**

WARGAMES

Platform: **PC**
Publisher: **MGM Interactive**
Developer: **Interactive Studios Ltd.**

WarGames is a realtime strategy title, set 20 years after the events of the 1983 movie. Ironically, players assume the role of a gamer logging on to a web site to play a game. However, the site ends up being the defense department computer, WOPR, running amok once again. Yet this time, the computer really does plan to wipe out humanity.

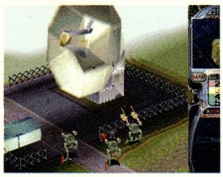
Setting the story aside, *WarGames* is an average realtime strategy game, with average graphics, average gameplay, and average level design. The player can choose to fight as either the WOPR's futuristic forces or conventional NORAD forces. Generally speaking, things play out in the all-too-familiar "put up a building, get your units, send waves of attackers" formula gamers have come to expect. It does have some good qualities, though. Despite being so-so, the game is entertaining, the story works well, and there is a wide variety of units to command.

In fact, *WarGames* is a fairly competent and well-crafted game. It just doesn't take the genre in any new direction and feels like little more than a me-too effort.

Rating: ★★★



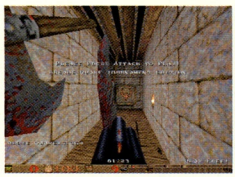




Graphically, *WarGames* offers nothing new, perhaps in deference to the retro aspect of its narrative origin

QUAKE

Platform: **Arcade**
Publisher: **LBE Inc.**
Developer: **Id Software**





Polygonal madness in the form of hungry military soldiers and monsters. Who can resist playing *Quake* in an arcade?

Believe it or not, *Quake* is in the arcades. LBE Inc., using Microsoft's Open Arcade Architecture, ported the PC game to an arcade cabinet, yet surprisingly, the result is true to the deathmatch we've come to know and love — and where it's not, the game is actually an improvement.

The arcade *Quake* features new weapons and monsters, an improved button configuration, and lightning-fast response. Initially, the game featured a mound of ill-placed buttons that made it difficult to control. Now the buttons are closer together and more intuitive.

Arcade *Quake* can be played in either single-player or multiplayer modes (supporting up to four players), and both are excellent. In what must have been a conscious decision, the single-player aspect enables gamers to play for long stretches without having to drop in more quarters (like at the end of a level, or after only two deaths). But multiplayer is obviously where it's at. The original levels are all there, and the fragging is fast and amazingly good in arcade form. In fact, it's even faster.

Finally, the new monsters and guns are fun and surprising, adding a new flavor to an old recipe. For those who don't have LAN or Internet capabilities, check out arcade *Quake*. It's a blast.

Rating: ★★★






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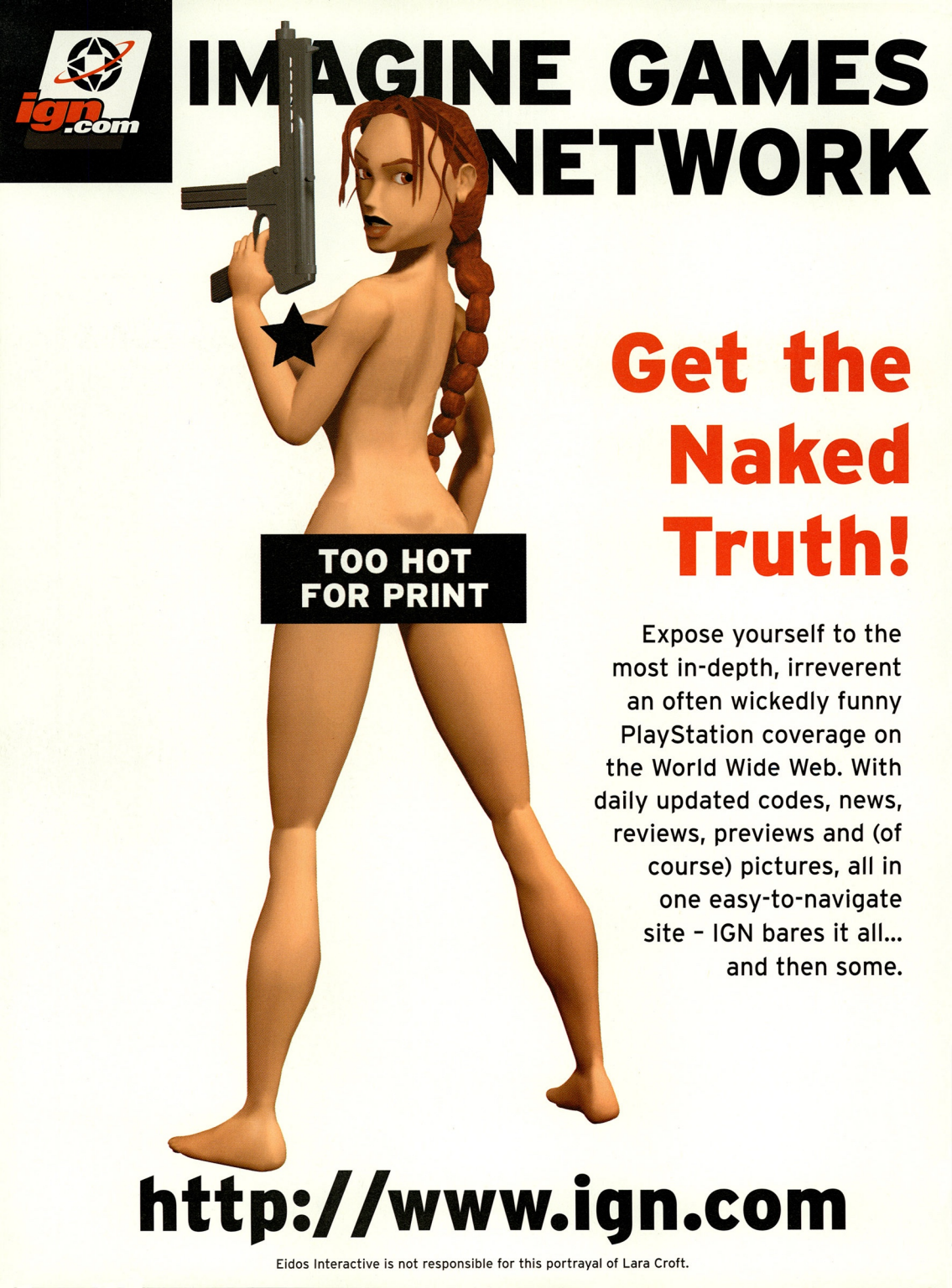
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Eidos Interactive is not responsible for this portrayal of Lara Croft.

THE GAMER'S GUIDE

The quintessential guide to released software

Welcome to the Gamer's Guide, the ultimate resource for checking what games to buy. Every month we add the reviews from last issue and push out an equal number of older ones. Which ones, you ask? Generally we leave the console titles in, even for games that are out of print, since there's a large used market. So PC games get dumped first, especially old, really bad PC titles (which, paradoxically, makes PC games look really, really good if you just check the ratings). Once again, please note the issue number — technology and game design march on relentlessly, so a game that got ★★★★ in **NG 6** might be hard-pressed to score ★★★ today.

Nintendo 64

title	publisher	rating	#
1080° Snowboarding	Nintendo	★★★★★	42
Aero Fighters Assault	Video Systems Inc.	★★★	36
Aero Gauge	Ascii	★★★	39
All Star Baseball '99	Acclaim	★★★★	43
Automobili Lamborghini 64	Titus	★★	37
Banjo-Kazooie	Nintendo	★★★★	43
Blast Corps	Nintendo	★★★★	31
Clay Fighter 63 1/3	Interplay	★★	36
Cruisin' USA	Nintendo	★	26
Dark Rift	Vic Tokai	★★★	31
Diddy Kong Racing	Nintendo	★★★★	37
Doom 64	Williams	★★★	29
Duke Nukem 64	GT Interactive	★★★	37
Extreme-G	Acclaim	★★★★	37
F1 Pole Position 64	Ubi Soft	★★★	36
FIFA Road to the World Cup 64	Electronic Arts	★★★★	38
FIFA Soccer 64	Electronic Arts	★★	30
Fighter's Destiny	Ocean	★★★★	41
Forsaken	Acclaim	★★★	43
Goldeneye 007	Nintendo	★★★★★	34
Hexen	GT Interactive	★★	32
International Superstar Soccer	Konami	★★★★★	32
International Superstar Soccer 98	Konami	★★★★	44
Killer Instinct Gold	Nintendo	★★	26
Mace: The Dark Age	Midway	★★	37
Madden 64	Electronic Arts	★★	37
Mario Kart 64	Nintendo	★★★	30
Mike Piazza's Strike Zone	GT Interactive	★	44
Mission: Impossible	Ocean	★★★	44
Mortal Kombat 4	Midway	★★★	44
Multi Racing Championship	Ocean	★★★★	33
Mystical Ninja	Konami	★★★	45
NBA Hangtime	Williams	★★	29
NBA in the Zone 64	Konami	★	41
Olympic Hockey '98	Midway	★	41
PilotWings 64	Nintendo	★★★★	21
QBC 64	Acclaim	★★★	37
Quake 64	Midway	★★★	41
Quest 64	THQ	★★★	43
Rampage World Tour	Midway	★★	41
Robotron 64	Crave Entertainment	★★★	39
San Francisco Rush	Midway Home	★★★★★	36
Shadows of the Empire	Nintendo	★★	26
Snowboard Kids	Atlus Software	★★★	40
StarFox 64	Nintendo of America	★★★★	32
Super Mario 64	Nintendo	★★★★★	21
Tetrisphere	Nintendo	★★★	35
Top Gear Rally	Midway	★★★★	37
Turok: Dinosaur Hunter	Acclaim	★★★	28
War Gods	Midway	★	31
WaveRace 64	Nintendo	★★★★★	25
Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey	Midway	★★★	29
Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey '98	Midway	★★	39
Wetrix	Ocean	★★★	44
Yoshi's Story	Nintendo	★★	41
Yuke Yuke Troublemakers	Enix	★★★	34

PlayStation

title	publisher	rating	#
2Xtreme	SCEA	★★	25
Abe's Oddysee	GT Interactive	★★★★	35
Ace Combat 2	Namco	★★★★	35
Adidas Power Soccer	Psygnosis	★★★	21
Adventures of Lomax, The	Psygnosis	★★	26
Agile Warrior	Virgin	★★	13
Alien Trilogy	Acclaim	★★★★	18
Alundra	Working Designs	★★★★	38
Andretti Racing	Electronic Arts	★★★★	25
Arc the Lad	SCEA	★★★★	10
Area 51	Midway	★★	27
Armored Core	SCEA	★★★★	37
Atari Collection One, The	Midway	★★★★	27
Auto Destruct	Electronic Arts	★★★	39
Azure Dreams	Konami	★★	44
Battlebizer Champions	LucasArts	★★★★	31
Battlestations	Electronic Arts	★★	31
Beyond the Beyond	SCEA	★★	23
Black Dawn	Virgin	★★★★	23
Blast Chamber	Activision	★★★	25
Blasto	SCEA	★★	42
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain	Activision	★★★★	24
Bloody Roar	SCEA	★★★★	41
Bogey Dead 6	SCEA	★★★	22
Bottom of the Ninth	Konami	★★★★	19
BRAHMA Force	Jaleco	★★★	30
Bravo Air Race	THQ	★★★	34
Breath of Fire III	Capcom	★★★★	41
Broken Helix	Konami	★★★	32
Bubsy 3D	Accolade	★★	26
Bug Riders	GT Interactive	★★	37
Burning Road	Playmates	★★★	27
Bushido Blade	Sony	★★★★★	31
Bushido Blade 2	SquareSoft	★★★★★	43
Bust-a-Move	Enix	★★★★	41
Buster Bros Collection	Capcom	★★★	30
Cardinal SYN	SCEA	★★	43
Carnage Heart	SCEA	★★★★	28
Castlevania: Symphony of the Night	Konami	★★★★	36
Circuit Breakers	Mindscape	★★★★	45
Clock Tower	Ascii	★★★★	37
Codename Tenka	Psygnosis	★★★	28
Colony Wars	Psygnosis	★★★★★	38
Contra: Legacy of War	Konami	★★★	25
Cool Boarders	SCEA	★★★	27
Cool Boarders 2	SCEA	★★★	37
Courier Crisis	GT Interactive	★	37
Crash 2: Cortex Strikes Back	SCEA	★★★★	37
Crash Bandicoot	SCEA	★★★	23
Croc: the Legend of the Gobbos	Fox Interactive	★★★	35
Crow: City of Angels, The	Acclaim	★	30
Crusader: No Remorse	Origin	★★★★	29
Cyberia	Interplay	★★★	16
CyberSled	Namco	★★	09
Cyberspeed	Mindscape	★★★	13
Dark Forces	LucasArts	★★★	26
Dark Omen	Electronic Arts	★★★	43
Dark Stalkers	Capcom	★★★	16
Darklight Conflict	Electronic Arts	★★	34
Dead or Alive	Tecmo	★★★★	37
Deathtrap Dungeon	Eidos	★	42
Deception	Tecmo	★★★	24
Defcon 5	Data East	★★★★	12
Descent	Interplay	★★★★	17
Descent Maximum	Interplay	★★★	29
Destruction Derby	Psygnosis	★★★★	11
Destruction Derby 2	Psygnosis	★★★★	25
Diablo	Electronic Arts	★★★★	42
Die Hard Trilogy	Fox Interactive	★★★★	23
Disney's Hercules	Virgin Interactive	★★	34
Disruptor	Universal Interactive	★★★★	24
Divide: Enemies Within, The	Viacom New Media	★★	28
Doom	Williams	★★★★	15
Dragon Ball GT Final Bout	Bandai	★	39
DragonHeart: Fire & Steel	Acclaim	★	28
Dynasty Warriors	KOEI	★★★★	32
Einhander	SCEA	★★★★	40
Fade to Black	Electronic Arts	★★★★	21
Fantastic 4	Acclaim	★	35
Felony 11-79	Ascii	★★★	34
FIFA '97	Electronic Arts	★	26
Fighting Force	Eidos	★★★	37
Final Doom	Williams	★★★	24
Final Fantasy Tactics	SCEA	★★★★	40
Final Fantasy VII	SCEA	★★★★★	34
Floating Runner	THQ	★★	27
Formula 1	Psygnosis	★★★★★	24
Forsaken	Acclaim	★★★	43
Frank Thomas Baseball	Acclaim	★★	32
Frogger	Hasbro Interactive	★	37
GameDay '97	Sony	★★★★★	27
G6X	Crystal Dynamics	★★★	15
Gex: Enter the Gecko	Crystal Dynamics	★★★	42
Ghost in the Shell	THQ	★★★	35
Goal Storm	Konami	★★★★	13
Goal Storm '97	Konami	★★★★	30
Granstream Saga	THQ	★★	44
Gran Turismo	SCEI	★★★★★	40
Grand Slam	Virgin	★★	31
Grand Tour Racing '98	Activision	★★★	36
Gridrunner	Virgin Interactive	★★★	23
Gunner's Heaven	Media Vision	★★★★	08
Gunship	MicroProse	★★	22
Hardball 5	Accolade Sports	★★	19
Herc's Adventures	LucasArts	★★★	35
Hot Shots Golf	SCE	★★★★	41
In the Zone	Konami	★★★	14
In the Zone 2	Konami	★★★★	26
Independence Day	Fox	★★	29
Iron & Blood: Warriors of RavenLoft	Acclaim	★★	24
Jersey Devil	MegaToon	★★★	44
Jet Moto	SCEA	★★★★	27
Jet Moto 2	SCEA	★★★	37
Judge Dredd	Activision	★	42
Jumping Flash!	SCEA	★★★★★	08
Jumping Flash! 2	SCEA	★★★★	20
K-1 The Arena Fighters	THQ	★★	30
Kartia	Atlus	★★★★	45
Kileak the Blood	SCEA	★★★	05
Kileak the Blood 2	SCEA	★★	16
King's Field	Ascii	★★★★	16
King's Field II	Ascii	★★★	26
Krazy Ivan	Psygnosis	★★★	17
League of Pain	Psygnosis	★★★	30
Loaded	Interplay	★★★★	14
Lode Runner	Natsume	★★★	39
Lost World: Jurassic Park, The	Electronic Arts	★★	34
Machine Hunter	MGM Interactive	★	34
Madden '97	EA Sports	★★★★	24
Madden '98	Electronic Arts	★★★	35
March Madness '98	Electronic Arts	★★	42
MechWarrior 2	Activision	★★★★	31
Mega Man X 4	Capcom	★★★	36
MegaMan 8	Capcom	★★	29
Micro Machines V3	Midway	★★★★	39
Midway Collection 2, The	Midway	★★★★	38
MLB '98	SCEA	★★★	35
MLB Pennant Race	SCEA	★★	25
Monster Rancher	Tecmo	★★★★★	38
Mortal Kombat 3	Williams	★★★	12
Mortal Kombat Mythologies	Midway	★	38
Moto Racer	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	36
Motor Toon Grand Prix	SCEA	★★★★	26
N2O	Fox	★★★	45
Nagano Winter Olympics 98	Konami	★★★	39
Namco Museum Volume 1	Namco	★★★★	21
Namco Museum Volume 2	Namco	★★	24
Namco Museum Volume 3	Namco	★★★	27
Nanotek Warrior	Virgin	★★★★	27
NASCAR Racing	Sierra	★★	24
NBA Jam Extreme	Acclaim	★★	28
NBA JAM TE	Iguana Entertainment	★★★★	12
NBA Live '96	Electronic Arts	★★★★	19
NBA Live '97	Electronic Arts	★★	25
NBA Shoot Out	SCEA	★★★	19
NBA Shoot Out '97	SCEA	★★★★	30
NCAA Gamebreaker	SCEA	★★★★	24
NCAA Gamebreaker '98	SCEA	★★★★★	38
Need For Speed II	Electronic Arts	★★	32
Need For Speed III	Electronic Arts	★★★★	43
Newman/Haas Racing	Psygnosis	★★	41
NFL GameDay	SCEA	★★★★★	14
NFL GameDay '98	SCEA	★★★★★	35
NHL '97	Electronic Arts	★★★	25
NHL '98	Electronic Arts	★★★★	36
NHL Breakaway '98	Acclaim	★★★	37
NHL Face Off	SCEA	★★★★★	15
NHL Face Off '97	SCEA	★★★★	25
NHL Face Off '98	SCEA	★★★	36
Nightmare Creatures	Activision	★★★	38
Nuclear Strike	Electronic Arts	★★★	36
Olympic Soccer	U.S. Gold	★★★	21
One	ASC Games	★★	39
Open Ice Challenge	Midway	★★	28
OverBlood	Electronic Arts	★★	31
Pandemonium	Electronic Arts	★★★	25
PaRappa the Rapper	SCEA	★★★★★	35
Parasite Eve	Square Electronic Arts	★★★	45
Peak Performance	Atlus	★★★	28
Perfect Weapon	ASC Games	★★	24
Persona	Atlus	★★★	27
PGA '98	Electronic Arts	★★★	36
Philosoma	SCEA	★★	16
Pitball	Accolade	★★★	25
Pitfall 3D	Activision	★★	42
PO'ed	Accolade	★★★★	19
Pocket Fighter	Capcom	★★★	45
Point Blank	Namco	★★★	40
Porsche Challenge	SCEA	★★★★	35
Power Baseball	Konami	★	08
Power Move Wrestling	Activision	★★★	26
Powerboat Racing	VR Sports	★★	42
Poy Poy	Konami	★★★★	33
Pro Pinball	Interplay	★★★	26
Project Overkill	Konami	★★★★	23
Project: Horned Owl	Sony	★★★	22
Psychic Force	Taito	★★	25

Punky Skunk	Jaleco	★	42
Rage Racer	Namco	★★★	32
Raiden	Seibu	★★	05
Rally Cross	Sony	★★★★	30
Rascal	Psygnosis	★★	43
Rayman	Ubi Soft	★★★★	10
ReBoot	EA	★★★	43
Re-Loaded	Interplay	★★	27
Rebel Assault 2	LucasArts	★★	26
Red Asphalt	Interplay	★★	37
Resident Evil	Capcom	★★★★★	17
Resident Evil 2	Capcom	★★★★★	39
Return Fire	Time Warner Interactive	★★★★	19
Ridge Racer	Namco	★★★★	04
Ridge Racer Revolution	Namco	★★	15
Risk	Hasbro	★★	45
Road Rash	Electronic Arts	★★★	16
Robo Pit	THQ	★★★	22
Robotron X	Midway	★★★	27
Rush Hour	Psygnosis	★★★	32
Saga Frontier	SCEA	★	43
Samurai Shodown III	SCEA	★★	25
Sentient	Psygnosis	★★★	30
Sentinel Returns	Psygnosis	★★	44
Shadow Master	Psygnosis	★	41
Shellshock	US Gold	★★★★	19
Shipwreckers!	Psygnosis	★★★	38
Shockwave Assault	Electronic Arts	★★	15
Sidewinder	Asmik (Japan)	★★★	18
Silverload	Vic Tokai	★★★★	18
SimCity 2000	Maxis	★★★	23
Skullmonkeys	EA	★★	40
Slam 'N' Jam	Crystal Dynamics	★★★	19
Slam Scape	Viacom	★	26
Soul Blade	Namco	★★★★	28
Soviet Strike	Electronic Arts	★★★★	24
Space Hulk	Electronic Arts	★★★	21
Space Jam	Acclaim	★	27
Spawn: The Eternal	SCEA	★	38
Speed Racer	Jaleco	★★	42
Spider	BMG	★★★	28
Spot Goes to Hollywood	Virgin Interactive	★	24
Star Gladiator	Capcom	★★★	24
Star Wars: Masters of Teras Kasi	LucasArts	★★	38
StarWinder	Mindscape	★★★	24
Steel Harbinger	Mindscape	★★★	24
Steel Reign	SCEA	★★	37
Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha	Capcom	★★★★	35
Street Racer	Ubi Soft	★★★★	24
Suikoden	Konami	★★★★	25
Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo	Capcom	★★★★	29
Syndicate Wars	Electronic Arts	★★★	34
Tail of the Sun	SCEA	★★★★	31
Tekken	Namco	★★★★	07
Tekken 2	Namco	★★★★★	20
Tekken 3	Namco	★★★★★	42
Tempest X	Interplay	★★★★	24
Tenchu	SCEI	★★★★	43
Ten Pin Alley	ASC Games	★★★★	27
Tennis Arena	Ubi Soft	★★	43
Test Drive 4	Accolade	★★	37
Theme Hospital	EA	★★★★	43
Thunder Truck Rally	Psygnosis	★★★	33
TigerShark	GT Interactive	★★★	29
Time Crisis	Namco	★★★★	38
TNN Hardcore 4X4	ASC	★★	26
Tobal No. 1	SCEA	★★★★	24
Toh Shin Den	Takara	★★★★	04
Tokyo Highway Battle	Jaleco	★★★	22
Tomb Raider II	Eidos	★★★★	37
Tomba	SCEA	★★★★	40
Top Gun	Spectrum Holobyte	★★	20
Total Eclipse Turbo	Crystal Dynamics	★★	10
Toukon Retsuden	Tomy	★★★★	14
Triple Play '98	EA Canada	★★★★	31
Tunnel B1	Acclaim	★★★	25
Turbo Prop Racing	SCEA	★★★★	45
Twisted Metal	SCEA	★★★★	13
Twisted Metal 2	SCEA	★★★★	30
Vandal Hearts	Konami	★★★★	29
Viewpoint	Electronic Arts	★	13
Vigilante 8	Activision	★★★★	45
Virtual Pool	Interplay	★★★	27
VMX Racing	Playmates Interactive Ent.	★★	36
VR Baseball '97	Interplay	★★	30
Warhammer: Shadow of the Horned Rat	Mindscape	★★★★	28
Warhawk	SCEA	★★★★	13
WCW Nitro	THQ	★★★	38
WCW vs The World	THQ	★★	30
Wild Arms	SCEA	★★★★	32
Wing Commander IV	Electronic Arts	★★	31
Wipeout	Psygnosis	★★★★★	11
World Cup '98	EA Sports	★★★★	45
Worms	Ocean	★★★★	19
WWF Wrestlemania	Acclaim	★★★★	12
X-Com: UFO Defense	MicroProse	★★★★★	14
X-Men: Children of the Atom	Acclaim	★★	40
X-Men vs. Street Fighter	Capcom	★	45
Xevious 3D/G+	Namco	★★★	31
Zero Divide	Time Warner	★★★	14

title	publisher	rating	#
Online			
Aliens Online	Kesmai	★★★	43
Command & Conquer: Sole Survivor	Westwood	★	41
Meridian 59: Revelation	3DO	★★★	37
Netstorm	Activision	★★★★	40
NetWAR	Headland	★★★	41
Tanarus	Sony	★★★★	40
Ultima Online	Origin	★★★★	37

title	publisher	rating	#
PC			
11th Hour, The	Virgin	★★	16
688(i) Hunter/Killer	Jane's Combat Simulations	★★★★	34
A Fork in the Tale	Anyriver	★	30
Abuse	Crack dot Com	★★★★	14
Addiction Pinball	MicroProse	★★★★	45
Advanced Tactical Fighters	Electronic Arts	★★★★	19
Afterlife	LucasArts	★★★	23
Age of Empires	Microsoft	★★★★	37
AH-64D Longbow	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	21
Air Warrior II	Interactive Magic	★★★★	31
Air Warrior III	Interactive Magic	★★★	40
Albion	Blue Byte	★★★★	23
Alien Earth	Playmates	★★★	42
Allied General	Mindscape	★★★★	18
Amber: Journeys Beyond	Graphic Simulations	★★★	27
American Civil War	Interactive Magic	★★★★	22
Andretti Racing	Electronic Arts	★★★★	39
Apache	Interactive Magic	★★★★★	11
Armor Command	Ripcord Games	★★★	43
Armored Fist	NovaLogic	★★★★	02
Army Men	3DO	★★★	44
Ascendancy	Broderbund	★★★★	12
Atlantis: The Lost Tales	Interplay	★★★	35
Azrael's Tear	Mindscape	★★★	25
Banzai Bug	Grolier	★★★	30
Battleground Waterloo	TalonSoft	★★★★	22
Battlespire	Bethesda	★★★	41
Battlezone	Activision	★★★★	42
Beast Within: A Gabriel Knight Mystery	Sierra On-Line	★★★★	17
Bedlam	GT Interactive	★★★	26
Betrayal in Antara	Sierra	★★★	34
Big Red Racing	Domark	★★★	19
Black Dahlia	Take 2 Interactive	★★	44
Blade Runner	Virgin	★★★★	39
Blood	GT Interactive	★★★★	33
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain	Activision	★★	36
Broken Sword: The Smoking Mirror	Virgin Interactive	★★★	36
Buried in Time: The Journeyman Project 2	Sanctuary Woods	★★★★	13
Burnout Championship Drag Racing	Bethesda Softworks	★★★	43
Caesar II	Sierra On-Line	★★★★	14
Capitalism	Interactive Magic	★★★★	13
Carmageddon	SCI	★★★★	33
CART Precision Racing	Microsoft	★★★★	38
Chaos Overloads	New World Computing	★★★★	21
Chronomaster	Capstone	★★★★	16
Circle of Blood	Virgin	★★★★	24
City of Lost Children, The	Psygnosis	★★	32
Civilization II	MicroProse	★★★★★	19
Close Combat	Microsoft	★★	22
Colonization	MicroProse	★★★★	01
Comanche 3	NovaLogic	★★★	33
Command & Conquer	Virgin	★★★★★	12
Command & Conquer: Red Alert	Virgin	★★★★	25
Conquest of the New World	Interplay	★★★	20
Creatures	Mindscape	★★★★★	35
Crusader: No Remorse	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	13
Curse of Monkey Island, The	LucasArts	★★★	39
D-Day: America Invades	Avalon Hill	★★★★	11
Dark Earth	MicroProse	★★★	37
Dark Forces	LucasArts	★★★	05
Dark Reign	Activision	★★★★	38
Deadlock II	Cyberlore Studios	★★★	43
Death Drome	Viacom	★★★	29
Death Rally	Apogee Software	★★★	27
Descent	Interplay	★★★★	05
Descent II	Interplay	★★★★	18
Descent Freespace	Interplay	★★★★	45
Descent to Undermountain	Interplay	★	41
Destruction Derby	Psygnosis	★★★★	14
Diablo	Blizzard	★★★★	28
Die by the Sword	Interplay	★★★★★	42
Dig, The	LucasArts	★★★★	15
Dinotopia	Turner Interactive	★★★★	20
Discworld	Psygnosis	★★★	05
Discworld II: Mortality Bytes!	Psygnosis	★★★	32
Dragon Dice	Interplay	★	35
Druid	Sir-tech	★★★★	17
Duke Nukem 3D	3D Realms	★★★★	20
Dungeon Keeper	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	33
EarthSiege 2	Sierra On-Line	★★★★	20
Earthworm Jim 1 & 2	Playmates	★★★★	21
Ecstatica 2	Psygnosis	★★★★	30
EF2000 v2.0	Ocean of America, Inc.	★★★★	36
Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall, The	Bethesda Softworks	★★★★★	24
Emperor of the Fading Suns	SegaSoft	★★★★	32
Excalibur 2055 A.D.	Sir Tech	★★	37
Extreme Assault	Blue Byte	★★	35
F-15	EA	★★★★	43
F-22 Lightning II	NovaLogic	★★	25
F1 Racing Simulation	Ubi Soft	★★★★	39
Fable	Sir-tech	★★★	31
Faery Tale Adventure II	Encore Software	★★	40
Fallen Haven	Interactive Magic	★★	32
Fallout	Interplay	★★★★	38
FIFA '96 Virtual Stadium Soccer	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	13
Fire Fight	Electronic Arts	★★★★	21
Flesh Feast	SegaSoft	★★★	45
Forsaken	Acclaim	★★★	44
Front Page Sports: Football Pro '97	Sierra	★★	29
FX Fighter	GTE Interactive	★★★★	09
Game, Net & Match	Blue Byte	★★★	45
G.Police	Psygnosis	★★★★	38
Grand Theft Auto	Take 2	★★★★	42
Havoc	Reality Bytes, Inc.	★★★★	16
Heavy Gear	Activision	★★★★	39
Heretic	Id Software	★★★★	05
Heroes of Might and Magic	New World Computing	★★★★	12
Hexen: Beyond Heretic	Id Software	★★★★	14
Hi-Octane	Electronic Arts	★★★★	10
Hind	Interactive Magic	★★★★	25
Hyper 3-D Pinball	Virgin	★★★★	18
Icebreaker	Twentieth Century Fox	★★★	20
IF-22 Raptor	Interactive Magic	★★★	35
Imperium Galactica	GT Interactive	★★★★	33
Industry Giant	Interactive Magic	★★★★	45
Interactive Fiction Collections	Activision	★★★★★	10
Interstate '76	Activision	★★★★	31
Into the Void	Playmates	★★★	33
Isle of Four Winds: Rune War, The	Arcanium Productions	★★★	39
Jazz Jackrabbit 2	G.O.D.	★	45
Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II	LucasArts	★★★★★	36
Jedi Knight: Mysteries of the Sith	LucasArts	★★★★	41
Jetfighter III	Interplay	★★★★	29
Journeyman Project 3	Red Orb	★★★★	41
Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny	Westwood Studio	★★★	37
Last Bronx	Sega	★★	43
Last Express, The	Broderbund	★★★★	31
Leisure Suit Larry 7: Love for Sail	Sierra	★★★	25
Lemmings Paintball	Psygnosis	★★★	22
Lighthouse	Sierra	★★	25
Links LS	Access	★★★★	24
Lion	Sanctuary Woods	★★★★	15
Lords of the Realm II	Sierra	★★★★	28
M.A.X.	Interplay	★★★★	30
M1A2 Abrams	Interactive Magic	★★★	32
M1 Tank Platoon II	MicroProse	★★★★	43
Magestalyer	GT Interactive	★★★★	37
Magic Carpet 2	Electronic Arts	★★★★	13
Magic: The Gathering	Spectrum Holobyte	★★	31
Master of Orion II	MicroProse	★★★	28
MDK	Playmates	★★★★	31
Meat Puppet	Playmates Interactive	★★★	34
MechWarrior 2	Activision	★★★★	10
MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries	Activision	★★★★	25
Micro Machines 2	GameTek	★★★	21
Might and Magic VI	3DO Company	★★★★	44
Mission Critical	Legend Entertainment Co.	★★★★	15
Monster Truck Madness	Microsoft	★★★★	26
Monster Truck Madness 2	Microsoft	★★★	44
Monty Python and the Holy Grail	7th Level	★★	22
Mortal Kombat 3	Williams	★★★★	10
Moto Racer GP	BMG	★★★★★	31
Myth	Bungie	★★★★	38
NASCAR Racing 2	Sierra On-Line	★★★	40
Nemesis: A Wizardry Adventure	Sir-Tech Software	★★★	27
NeoHunter	Virgin Interactive	★	27
Neverhood, The	DreamWorks Interactive	★★★	24
NHL '97	Electronic Arts	★★★★	24
NHL Hockey '96	Electronic Arts	★★★★	13
Nitro Racers	3DO (Europe)	★★★★	28
Normality	Interplay	★★★	23
Obsidian	SegaSoft	★	30
Of Light and Darkness	Interplay	★★	43
Outlaws	LucasArts	★★★	32
Outwars	Microsoft	★	43
Pandora Directive, The	Access Software	★★★★	24
Pax Imperia: Eminent Domain	THQ	★★	37
Phantasmagoria	Sierra On-Line	★★★	12
Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh	Sierra	★★★	27
Pizza Tycoon	MicroProse	★★★★	06
Pod	Ubi Soft	★★★	31
Postal	Ripcord	★★★★	37
Powerhouse	Impressions	★★★★	10
Powerslave	Playmates	★★	30
Princess Maker 2	Ignite	★★★	32
Prisoner of Ice	InMotion	★★★	12
Private Eye	Simon & Schuster	★★	22
Privateer 2: The Darkening	Origin/EA	★★★★	29
Pure Wargame, Vol. 1	QQP	★★★	08
Qin: Tomb of the Middle Kingdom	Learn Technologies	★	23
Quake	Id Software	★★★★★	22
Quake 2	Activision	★★★★	39
RAMA	Sierra	★★	26
Rayman	Ubi Soft	★★★	18
Realms of Arkania II: Shadows Over Riva	Sir-Tech	★★★★	33
Realms of Arkania: Star Trail	Sir-Tech	★★★	03
Realms of the Haunting	Interplay	★★★★	30
Rebel Assault II	LucasArts	★★	15
Rebellion	LucasArts	★★	43
Red Baron II	Sierra	★★★★	40
Redjack	THQ	★★★	45
Redneck Rampage	Interplay	★★★	32
Redneck Rampage Rides Again	Interplay	★★★	45
Relentless	Electronic Arts	★★★★	01
Riddle of Master Lu, The	Sanctuary Woods	★★★★	13
Riven	Red Orb	★★★	38
Rocket Jockey	SegaSoft	★★★★	27
Rocky Mountain Trophy Hunter	WizardWorks	★★	44
Sabre Ace: Conflict Over Korea	Virgin Interactive	★★★	38
Sanitarium	ASC	★★★★	44
Scarab	Electronic Arts	★★★	30
Screamer	Virgin	★★★★	17
Screamer 2	Virgin	★★★★	25
Sega Rally	Sega	★★★	30
Sega Touring Car Championship	Sega	★★	42
Sentient	Psygnosis	★★	33
Shattered Steel	Interplay	★★★	26
Shell Shock	Eidos Interactive	★★	23
Shivers	Sierra On-Line	★★★★	17
Shivers 2: Harvest of Souls	Sierra On-Line	★★	32
Sid Meier's Gettysburg	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	37
Silent Thunder: A-10 Tank Killer II	Sierra On-Line	★★	20
Space Bar, The	Boffo Games	★★★★	33
Spec Ops	Ripcord	★★★★	43
Spycraft: The Great Game	Activision	★★★★	19
Star Command Revolution	GT Interactive	★★	31
Star Control 3	Accolade	★★★★	25
Star Trek Pinball	Interplay	★	43
StarCraft	Cendant	★★★★★	43
Starfleet Academy	Interplay	★★★	36
Starship Titanic	Simon & Schuster	★★★★	43
Streets of Sim City	Maxis	★	40
Strife	Velocity	★★★	20
Sub Culture	Ubi Soft	★★★★	37
Swarm	Reflex Entertainment	★★	44
Syndicate Wars	Electronic Arts	★★★★	25
Temujin	SouthPeak Interactive	★★★	38
Terminator: Future Shock	Bethesda Softworks	★★	16
Terminator: SkyNET	Bethesda Softworks	★★★★★	26
Terra Nova	Looking Glass	★★★★	19
Test Drive Off Road	Accolade	★★	31
Tex Murphy: Overseer	Access	★★	42
Theme Hospital	Bullfrog/Origin	★★★★	31
Tomb Raider Gold	Eidos Interactive	★★★	43
Toonstruck	Virgin	★★★	26
Torin's Passage	Sierra On-Line	★★★★	15
Total Annihilation	GT Interactive	★★★★	36
Twinsen's Odyssey	Activision	★★★★	34
Ultimate Race Pro	MicroProse	★★★★	43
U.S. Navy Fighters	Electronic Arts	★★★★	03
Under a Killing Moon	Access	★★★★	02
Unreal	GT Interactive	★★★★★	44
Uprising	Cyclone Studios	★★★★★	37
Virtual Pool	Interplay	★★★★★	09
Virtual Pool 2	Interplay	★★★★★	38
Virus	Sintech	★★	40
VR Soccer	VR Sports	★★★	20
Wages of War	3DO	★★	28
WarCraft 2: Tides of Darkness	Blizzard Entertainment	★★★★★	15
Warlords III: Reign of Heroes	Red Orb	★★★	35
Werewolf vs. Comanche	NovaLogic	★★★	13
Whiplash	Interplay	★★★★	18
Williams Arcade Classics	Williams	★★★★	15
Wing Commander IV: The Price of Freedom	Origin	★★★★	18
Wing Commander Prophecy	Electronic Arts	★★★★	40
Wipeout XL	Psygnosis	★★★★	33
Witchaven II: Blood Vengeance	Intracorp	★★	22
X-COM: Apocalypse	MicroProse	★★★	35
X-COM: Terror from the Deep	MicroProse	★★★★	07
X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter	LucasArts	★★★	32
XCar: Experimental Racing	Bethesda Softworks	★★★	35
Z	Virgin	★★★★	23
Zone Raiders	Virgin	★★★★	16
Zork: Grand Inquisitor	Activision	★★★★	39

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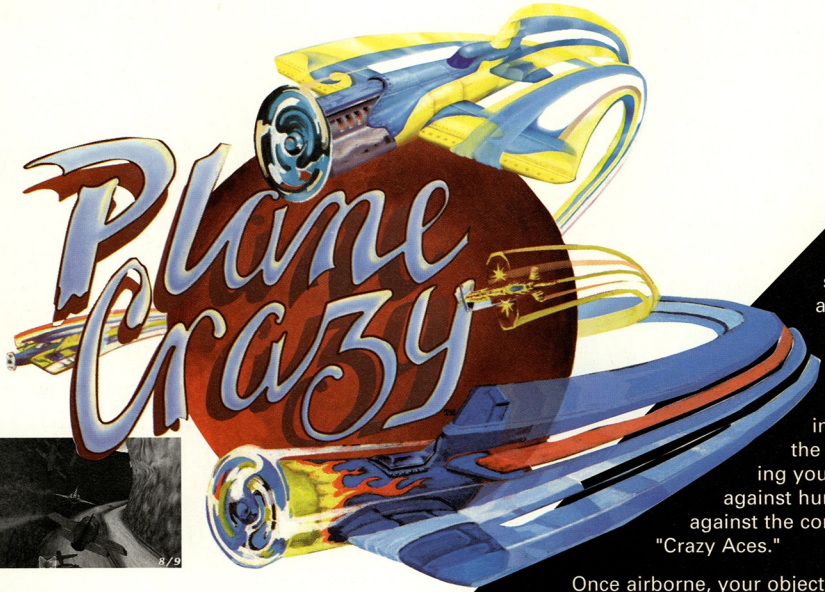
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LETTERS

You write, we print

In issue 44 your main topic is about the next war of game consoles, including all the consoles that are participating. It says, "Nintendo 64: Will it survive?" but what are the odds of it surviving? I have a Nintendo 64, but Dreamcast is looking very good, and I'm thinking about changing to Sega. Will Nintendo launch the 64DD, or will it die? I have a Sega Genesis I bought some time ago, then a year later Sega launched Saturn and totally abandoned it — very few games came out and it finally died. I barely had five games for Genesis. I had the Sega CD also and only had one game for it. Will Sega Saturn die a slow death like Genesis and Sega CD, or is it already dead? Will Sega's Dreamcast have a lot of games like PlayStation and last a long time, or will it die like the rest of its family of game consoles?

Arthur Arias
DavArias@email.msn.com

To begin with, Nintendo 64 has an installed base of 3.5 million units in North America alone. Even if Nintendo failed to sell a single machine again after Dreamcast is released, that's still a respectable audience (and likely to be larger than Dreamcast's for at least a couple of years), and there's no doubt the system would still be supported. When you consider that N64 is likely to still sell new units, no matter what else is available, the picture only gets better — not the newest, fastest console on the block anymore, but if there's money to be made, the games will follow. As for 64DD, don't hold your breath. Does it exist? Yes. Have games been written for it? Yes. Will it be released in the U.S.? Might as well ask if Batman is a transvestite — at this point, who really cares?

The Saturn is dead in the U.S. Period. Its respectable installed base in Japan means that a few titles will continue to be published there, but don't expect anything that exciting. As for Dreamcast, the outlook is getting better and better — naysayers like Kelly Flock (**NG 45**) aside. Expect a decent number of good titles at launch, and with a steadily growing user base, a continually expanding library of games.



Games like *PaRappa* are proof that console titles can appeal to both men and women alike

In **NG 44**, you said that Nintendo had two major unannounced titles, *Metroid 64* and *Mario 2*. Are you just throwing not-too-subtle hints at Nintendo to make these games, or do you have a secret that you're not sharing? Also, if they do exist, will they be 2D or 3D?

And you have way too much PC and Dreamcast info. You've done three features on Dreamcast in two months. It doesn't exist! And most people can't afford a Voodoo^2 PC with 5,000,000MB of RAM.

Derek Mahlburg
mahlburg@ponyexpress.net

First off, we share every secret we find out (unless we're specifically asked not to under a non-disclosure agreement or we're told something off the record — we're ethical journalists, after all). We can say with some authority that *Metroid 64* and *Mario 64 2* are in the works. In fact, both titles are pretty much no-brainers for Nintendo, and they will all but certainly both be in 3D.

For your second point, look at the name of the magazine: We're not called **Last Generation**. We will, as always, continue to cover the entire spectrum of gaming, including PlayStation, Nintendo 64, arcade, and even (as we did with news of Game Boy Camera) handhelds when appropriate. However, our charter is to cover the cutting edge in more depth and with better perspective than anyone else can, and right now that means Voodoo^2 and Dreamcast — a console that does, indeed, exist and will be launched in Japan within two months of your reading this.

And for the record, no one except the government could afford a 5 terabyte PC, but judging by sales of high-end PCs over the last year, an increasing number of people can and do buy machines with Voodoo^2 and a respectable 64-128MB RAM, and that's where the cutting edge is.

Do you think there will be any games designed specifically for females on the consoles in the near future? The so-called "girl games" in the computer world aren't really games, but more multimedia. Is it even possible to make a game for girls without turning it into some type of multimedia program?

Anonymous

You're right, most of the titles that fall under the heading "girl games" are in fact just multimedia entertainment, not games. *Barbie Fashion Designer* is the best example — while girls love it, it ain't a game.

The bigger issue is this: Just what is a "game that is designed specifically for females"? We think it's sexist to assume that women need special games designed just for them. The issue for us is getting women to sit down with a console game, period. Most of the time, when women actually try games, they like them. The problem is, because many games assume players have knowledge about how videogames work, first-time players (including many women) quickly become frustrated.

The reason we feel that many women seem to like puzzle games is because the barriers to entry in those games are very low. It's a lot easier to pick up *Tetris* and start playing than it is to play *Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha* for the first time and have any fun.

Any good game with low barriers to entry should appeal to women as well as men. *PaRappa*

is probably the perfect example. The issue then isn't "girl games," it's "good games."

When I got your magazine, I was delighted, especially when I saw the cover! There was a real picture of the Project X console — what more can I ask for?

Actually, how about a picture of the *Zelda 64* cartridge? How come I didn't get the cover with the gold cartridge on it? I saw it on page 21 of **NG 44**, with Howard Lincoln signing some lucky kid's copy of **NG 42**. And then to rub it in, you put an ad for your own mag using that cover with the caption, "A magazine this important comes 12 times a year." Now I had three thoughts: Either it was an E3-exclusive cover (be there and get it), or maybe there was more than one cover that month, or maybe I'm just the only kid in the world that got the cover without the cartridge. Please, fill me in!

"melon"
melon@ultranet.com

Right the first time. The gold foil cover was a limited edition of only 5,000 copies for distribution at E3 — if you didn't get one then, you probably won't get one ever.

Sorry, but that gold is expensive, y'know?

Since my PC is not my primary game system, I only buy a few games a year for it. At the risk of sounding stupid, here's my question: What exactly is DirectX, and how does it work to enhance games? Most (if not all) of the games I've purchased allow me to install a "new version" of DirectX. So, what does this mean? Is DirectX a software accelerator? If so, why is it listed as a requirement or recommendation for lots of games if anyone can install it on their system? Shouldn't I be able to then just install a new version of DirectX and run games accelerated? Please clear this up for me, as I've been wanting to play games such as *Unreal* that support DirectX. I'm pretty confused!

Mike Weinstein
prshmrgl@theglobe.com

DirectX is a suite of Microsoft-authored APIs (Application Programming Interface) that run under Windows 95/98 (and any time now, WindowsNT 5.0 — maybe). DirectX includes Direct3D, DirectSound, DirectDraw, etc. Theoretically, these provide a standard set of instructions that programmers can use for generically interacting with an item of hardware, like a sound card (i.e.: "make a beep"). The API then "interprets" those commands and sends them to the sound card's own native driver, whatever that is ("call register AE08 on this system's Creative SoundBlaster Pro"). This saves programmers the trouble of having to write code for every individual make and model of hardware, which is both time-consuming and tedious. It also reasonably assures consumers that the software they just bought will work just fine with whatever hardware they own.

DirectX has continued to evolve and become more flexible, incorporating more and more functions, and naturally game designers would prefer to work with the most up-to-date version to take advantage of them. Later versions are often more efficient and may actually help a game run faster, but improving the API by itself doesn't add anything the hardware doesn't have. Direct3D 6, for example, will likely support commands for performing bump-mapping, but if your 3D card doesn't do bump-mapping in the first place, just installing DirectX 6 won't give you that ability. Also, DirectX's generic nature often means that native APIs (like 3Dfx's Glide for its Voodoo chipset line) will run faster and more efficiently, and enable the use of every feature the card can perform.

And it's not a stupid question.



Correction: Last month, we ran a picture of Ascii's steering wheel next to some editorial about Microsoft's force-feedback wheel, which may have confused some people (like us, while we were editing it). Here, for the record, is the correct image of Microsoft's wheel



Our gold cartridge *Zelda* cover was a limited edition issue. If you missed E3, you missed your chance to get it

The N64 is a man's game system! Real men don't need 650MB of CD storage. Real men do just fine with 8MB cartridges that cost $80. We don't need the 500 games PlayStation has. We're manly enough to do just fine with the 25 or so we have. We're also happy that the 64DD has been delayed from here to eternity. After all, waiting makes you stronger (waiting for the SNES CD made us really strong).

N64 is for real men, and we don't need girlie games like *Duke Nukem* when we can have manly games starring a plumber who walks around jumping on the heads of goombas and little walking bombs, not to mention furry squirrels like in *Banjo-Kazooie*. Us real men are waiting for the Barney sing-along game that we feel sure Nintendo will give us any day now.

I feel that most real men will also agree with me in saying that putting a 64 behind every game title is a really good idea. It's nice to repeatedly be reminded we are playing a 64-bit machine. We also hope this will continue as 1,000 years from now we want our great^{64} children to be playing *Super Mario 16777216* on their Nintendo 16777216 (which we are hoping will have 16MB cartridges). Meanwhile, we hope that they will resist the urge to play on any of those "other" systems with their RDB (Really Damn Big) discs that store 2,000GB on each side.

Thank you, thank you! All hail the king of sarcasm corner!

Brian Moore
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by **Steven Kent**, author of a forthcoming book on the history of videogames

Resurrection (part 2)

Nintendo of America has sold more than 33 million NESs, placing them in more than one-third of all U.S. homes; however, the road to success was not without bumps.

Thirteen years ago, Nintendo tried to launch an American version of the Famicom (later known as the Nintendo Entertainment System or NES in the United States) through a partnership with Atari. The partnership fell through, however, forcing Nintendo to do its own marketing. The unveiling of the Famicom took place at the 1985 Winter Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Few retailers even bothered visiting Nintendo's booth, and those who did had no interest in carrying a new videogame console.

Howard Lincoln, Nintendo of America vice president of administration, and Minoru Arakawa, NOA president, decided that they needed a gimmick or a disguise that allowed them to refer to their product as something other than a videogame machine. They ended up with two gadgets — a light pistol and a little robot.

Nintendo's arcade division had recently scored hits with two arcade shooting games — *Vs. Hogan's Alley* and *Duck Hunt*. By adding a light gun, which they called "the Zapper," to the Famicom, Nintendo turned the system into a virtual shooting arcade — allowing Lincoln and Arakawa to position it as a gun game instead of as a videogame.

The robot, which they named the Robot Operating Buddy (ROB), was the work of Gumpei Yokoi and the engineers of Nintendo's research and development Team #1, the same team that developed the Game & Watch handheld games and the arcade hardware for *Donkey Kong*.

ROB was a small plastic robot that worked in conjunction with two Famicom games — *Gyromite* and *Stacker*. Technologically speaking, ROB was a pretty simple toy that offered very little play value.

When we first got the robot, it did not look like anything that you could associate with the fun and excitement of our arcade games. When you put the batteries in, he made this horrible grinding sound, and his arms slowly closed and they slowly opened. It was scary. At the same time, he did this really cool thing. He did this technology thing where he would look at the screen. It was new technology, he could somehow read what was going on on the screen. That was the big thing with ROB — it was reading the screen. That allowed the retailers to think about it as a new toy.

— Howard Phillips, early Nintendo employee



As they prepared for Summer CES, in Chicago, Lincoln and Arakawa gave the Famicom a new name — the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES).

In the spring of '85, we came up with the idea of this robot. At the June '85 show, we had a booth and we launched the product as the Nintendo Entertainment System. We changed our position. We were selling a robot game, not a videogame. It also let you play Duck Hunt, Wild Gunman, *and* Hogan's Alley.

— Howard Lincoln

Arakawa chose to work out of a small (600 square feet), quiet booth at Summer CES. He positioned ROB as his center attraction. Several buyers expressed interest in the NES, though none placed orders for the system. As Lincoln and Arakawa had predicted, retail buyers were more receptive to gun and robot games than they were to videogames. They inspected the NES carefully, and many commented that they liked the games.

We kind of all looked at it and chuckled as we walked through the

show because we all knew that videogames were dead. This was the age of the floppy disk, the Commodore 64, the Apple IIC, the IBM PC, and the little one — PC Junior. Everybody was talking about the Amiga and the Atari ST. That was where everybody thought the business was, really. Nobody thought that Nintendo had much of a chance, and they kind of all laughed at what they were doing.

— Greg Fischbach, founder, Acclaim Entertainment

Although he was disappointed by the lukewarm response, Arakawa did not give up. In an attempt to prove the NES's viability, he hired a marketing firm to run focus testing. The company brought in groups of boys to test the NES and express their opinions on it. With Arakawa watching from behind a two-way mirror, most of the boys said they hated the games.

After the focus tests, Arakawa called Hiroshi Yamauchi, both his boss and his father in-law, and suggested giving up. He began to believe that the American videogame market had shut down for good. Yamauchi did not agree. He proposed testing the NES in stores (instead of at trade shows) in America's toughest retail market — New York City.

It was clear that [New York] would be the toughest market to test it in, and that was the entertainment capital. He had made the comment that it would be a really fair test because if you could do a good job in New York, you could pretty much do anything anywhere. I think that was probably his attitude.

— Howard Lincoln

Arakawa rented a warehouse in Hackensack, New Jersey, and approximately 30 NOA employees traveled from Seattle to New York to personally visit retailers and push the system. The first shipment of Nintendo Entertainment Systems did not come close to filling the truck on which they were transported. The New York test began in late August. By October, it became very apparent that retailers were not ready to gamble on videogames, even after visits from factory representatives. In the end, Arakawa had to make a very dangerous gamble. He offered to transport his systems to stores, set up the displays, support the product with a $5 million advertising campaign, and buy back any unsold merchandise. The store owners had absolutely nothing to lose except some valuable floor space during their all-important holiday season.

We rented a truck so that we could deliver orders, and we let people order the systems risk-free. We did the merchandising. We trained their people. We did everything.

Then we really spent a lot of money on TV. Everybody was surprised that videogames sold there [New York].

— Minoru Arakawa

Due to persistence and risk-free merchandising, Arakawa's sales team was able to place displays in more than 500 stores around the New York area — including such major toy retailers as Toys "R" Us and FAO Schwartz. More importantly, the retailers were able to sell nearly 50,000 NES game consoles. (At this point, the package included a console, a Zapper, ROB, and two games — *Gyromite* and *Duck Hunt*. *Super Mario Brothers* was not packed in until later.)

Nintendo has done a good job of publicizing the gutsy New York operation, which was covered by David Sheff in *Game Over*, a brilliant book about the history of Nintendo.

The story that has not gotten much coverage, however, is what happened next. New York could certainly be classified as a limited success, but Nintendo did not earn a national reputation by selling 50,000 consoles in a 500-store test market over the holiday season. After New York, Yamauchi and Arakawa decided to take their show on the road — to Los Angeles. Shortly after launching their system in Los Angeles, Nintendo set up a very strategic partnership to help with future markets. Their new partner was Worlds of Wonder.

Being associated with Atari, Nintendo's first choice distributor, would likely have hurt more than helped Nintendo's cause. The collapse of the 2600 market had left Atari with a bad name that would haunt it to the end. Worlds of Wonder, on the other hand, had two of the most successful toys of all time — a talking teddy bear named Teddy Ruxpin and Laser Tag.

They approached us in 1986. We obviously had a strong relationship with the retailers, both with Teddy Ruxpin and with Laser Tag. With that type of clout, we were able to work closely with the buying community to ensure that Nintendo didn't get put on the back burner and that in fact, it was a priority for the buying community.

— Jim Whims, former executive vice president, Worlds of Wonder

Interestingly, Nintendo originally faced the same problem with Worlds of Wonder that it faced with retailers. Several ex-Atari executives founded Worlds of Wonder, and not surprisingly, its marketing representatives were mostly from Atari too. When they were presented with the prospect of representing Nintendo, they quietly said they did not want anything to do with videogames.

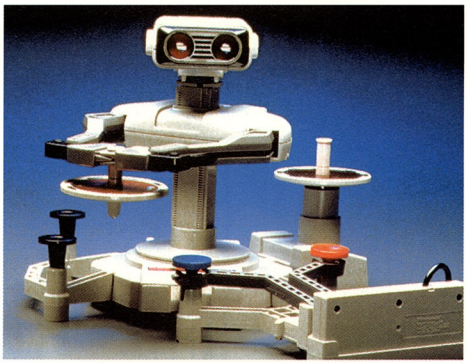
I'll always remember that discussion. The obvious answer was, "Well listen, I'm glad you feel that way; but I have to tell you, if you want to sell Teddy Ruxpin and you want to sell Laser Tag, you're gonna sell Nintendo as well. And if you feel that strongly about it, then you ought to just resign the line now."

— Jim Whims

In the end, Nintendo was able to cash in on Atari's clout without having to deal with the company's baggage. The new partnership did not last long, however. Worlds of Wonder imploded in 1987, but even that worked to Nintendo's advantage.

With the approval of Don Kingsborough, Nintendo hired many Worlds of Wonder's field representatives, giving the Japanese company complete control of the marketing arm it had once hoped to share with Atari.

Arakawa called Hiroshi Yamauchi and suggested giving up. **He began to believe that the American videogame market had shut down for good.** Yamauchi did not agree



Nintendo created the Robot Operating Buddy as a gimmick to sell the Famicom as something other than a videogame console

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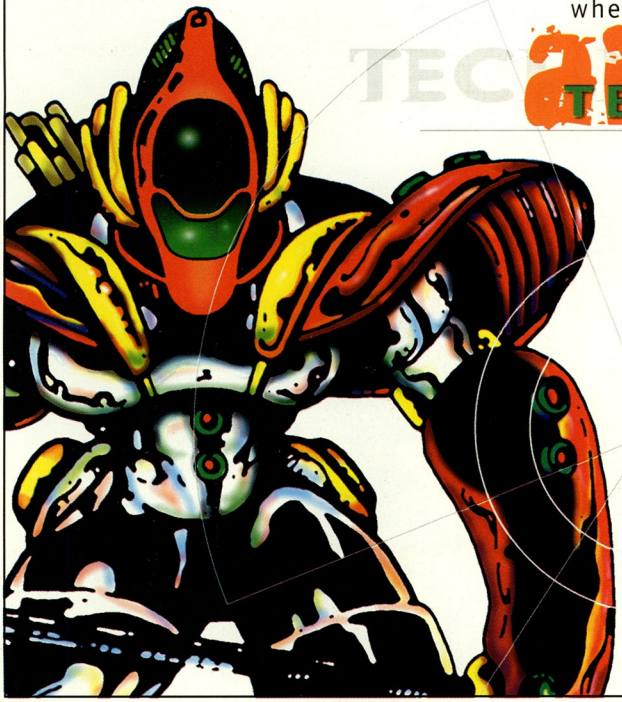
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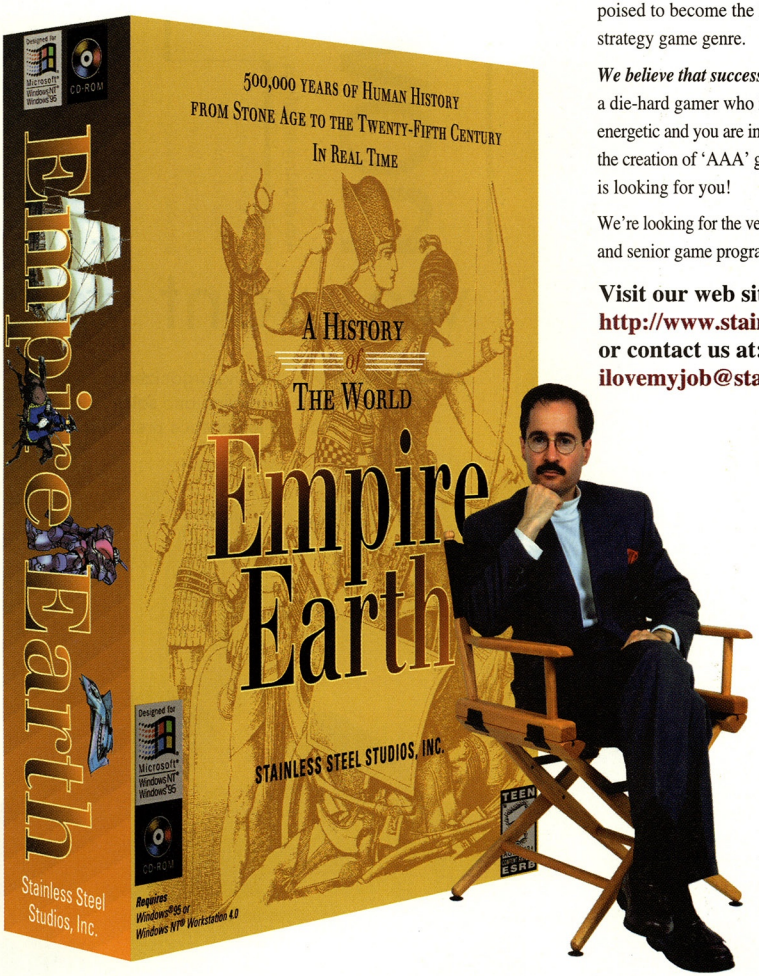
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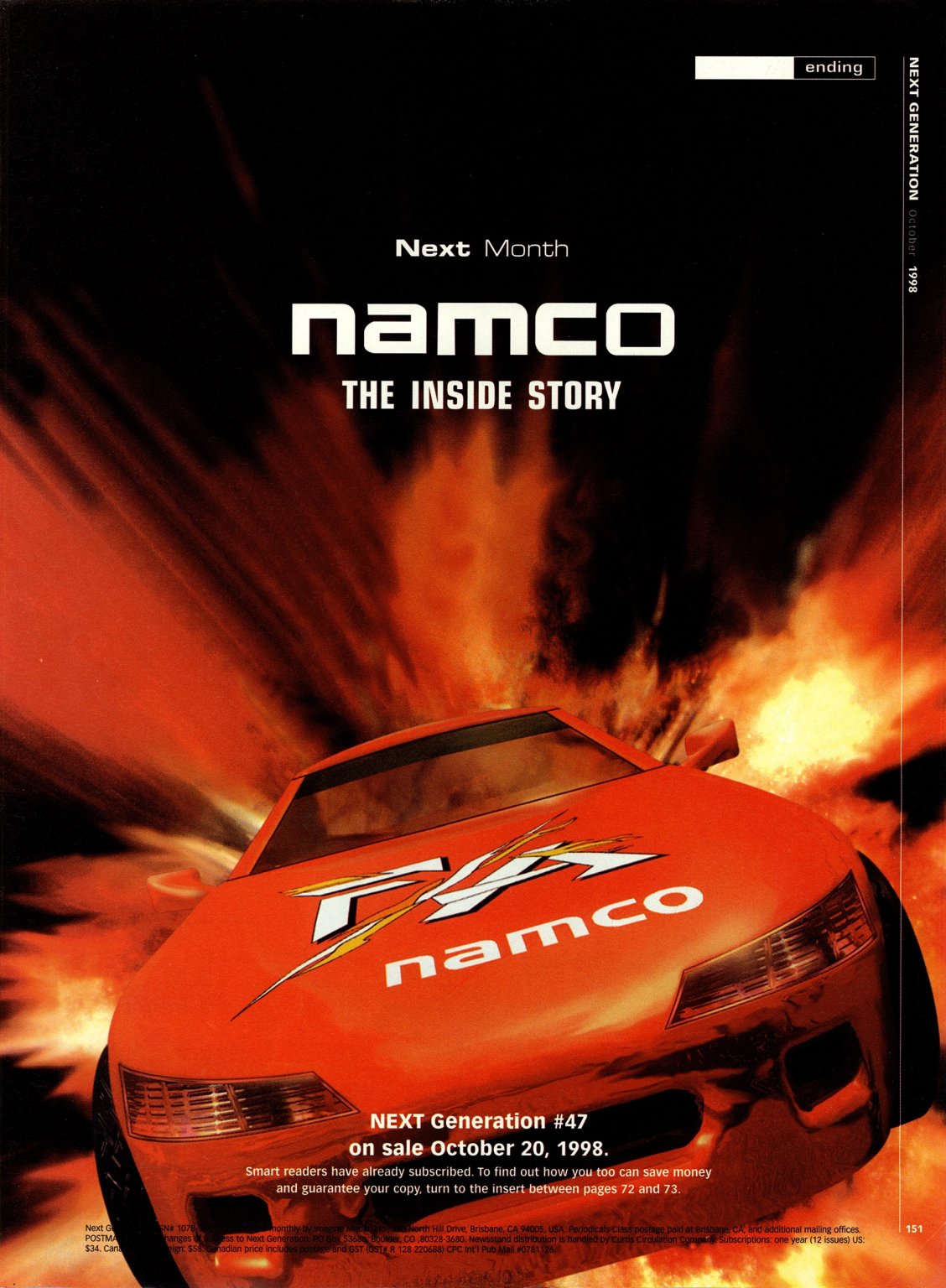
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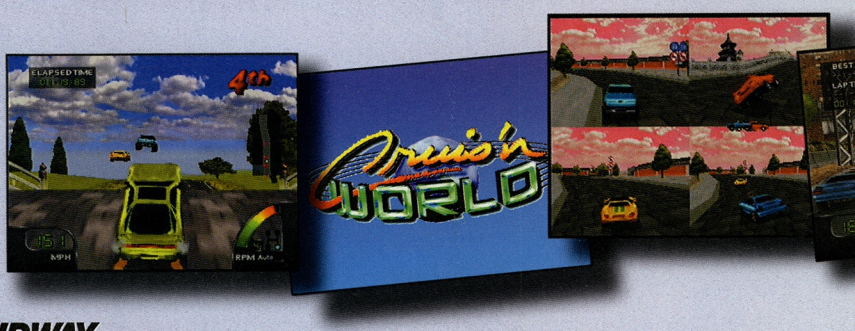


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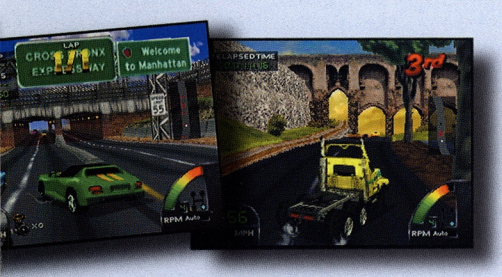


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